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MAP OF
THE
HOLY LAND

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE
GOSPEL HISTORY

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MEDITERRANEAN SEA



Lebanon
Mt
Tyrones
SYRIA

DAMASCUS
Albana R.

SIDON

TYRE

Mt Hermon
R. Pharpar

Dan
CAESAREA PHILLIPI

ITURAEA

ACCHO

GALILEE

AURANITIS

TRACHONITIS

Carmel

Chorazin
Capernaum
Magdala
Sea of Galilee
TIBERIAS
Nazareth
Plain of Esdraelon
Sahim

GADARA
BETHABARA
BETHANIA
Scythopolis

CAESAREA

SAMARIA

Gaulonitis

Sebasto
Mt Gorizim
Brook Kanah
Sycha

Pella

JOPPA

JUDEA

PEREA

ARABIA

Bethel
Ephraim
Shiloh

Mt Gilead

JERUSALEM
Bethany
Bethlehem

Nebo
Macherus

HEBRON

DEAD SEA

IDUMEA

BEERSHEBA

Bib. Lit

THE
GOSPEL HISTORY
FOR THE YOUNG

BEING

LESSONS ON THE LIFE OF CHRIST ADAPTED FOR USE
IN FAMILIES AND IN SUNDAY SCHOOLS

BY

WILLIAM F. SKENE, D.C.L., LL.D.

HISTORIOGRAPHER-ROYAL FOR SCOTLAND

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P R E F A C E.

THE author feels that this little work requires explanation, and perhaps apology, as the production of a layman. Its history is very simple. The author has for many years taught in a Sunday-school open to children of all Churches. The teaching is therefore unsectarian, and consists in the main of the Scriptures only, chapters in the Bible being read and then explained in conversation with the children. The author has always held that the best basis for imparting religious instruction to children is to make them know their Bible well. He found, however, that though they thus became well acquainted with separate chapters of the four Gospels, and their meaning, they did not acquire any clear conception of the order of the events, or of the course of our Saviour's life. He therefore, during the last few years, gave the senior class a course of lessons on the life of Christ, and the

present work consists of these lessons printed very much as they were delivered, in the hope that they may be of as much use to other young persons as they appeared to be to those who heard them.

In one sense the author thinks this little work supplies a want. He does not think the so-called Lives of Christ which have been published during the last few years are of much use to the young. However ably compiled and beautifully written, their language does not make the same impression upon them as the terse and graphic descriptions of the Evangelists. Nor are the numerous Commentaries on the Books of the New Testament of much greater use to them. The form in which they are compiled, consisting of annotations on individual verses, is not well adapted for this purpose, and the author has derived little advantage from them. The form this little work takes is to select from one of the Gospels the most full and striking narrative of each of the events of our Saviour's life in their order for perusal, and to append to it a general explanation of the passage selected. The author has not thought it necessary to indicate the grounds upon which the order of the events has been arranged, which is the result of a careful

study of the narratives of the four Evangelists, and their bearing upon each other; and, although he is familiar with the results of recent criticism, both by German and English writers, upon the authority and truth of the Gospels, he thought it out of place to lay before young people the reasoning by which he arrived at the conclusions upon which the work is based. What, therefore, may appear simply assumptions on his part are in reality the result of much study of the subject. Thus, in connection with the origin of the Gospels, the author has not overlooked what is perhaps the latest exposition of the subject, viz. that contained in the very striking and able article on the Gospels in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* by the Rev. E. A. Abbot, D.D., but, after careful study of that article, he came to the conclusion that the ingenious theory of their origin there given is not tenable. He considers that the Gospels as we now have them were the first written Gospels, and were the work of the authors whose names they bear, and that they were preceded by oral teaching only. He very much agrees with the views of the Archbishop of York in his extremely able Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels, and with those of Canon Westcott in his Introduction to the

Gospel of St. John, both published in the *Speaker's Commentary*.

In delivering these little lectures, the author did not scruple to make use of the writings of others where they suited his purpose, but, as he is anxious to avoid loading his pages with footnotes or references, he must abstain from any special acknowledgment of them, with the exception that he ought to mention the assistance he has derived from the very able papers which have appeared from time to time in that most valuable periodical, the *Expositor*.

With these remarks he can only commend his little work to those for whom it is designed.

W. F. S.

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THE GOSPEL HISTORY

FOR

THE YOUNG.

INTRODUCTION.

Lesson I.

THE GOSPELS.

Read

ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL i. 1—5.

FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN i. 1—5.

WHAT I propose for our study this year is the Life of Christ. You may feel surprised that I should propose this, as if it were a new subject for your consideration, having already gone over the Gospels and part of the Acts of the Apostles with me. That is true; but what we have hitherto been doing was merely to take a chapter of one of the Gospels and endeavour to understand its meaning. I have no doubt that you have not forgotten

the instruction you derived from it; but it has of course been upon isolated passages of the Gospel History, while it has not given you any clear conception of the whole course of our Saviour's life, work, and teaching as a consecutive history. For instance, have you a clear idea of how long our Saviour's ministry lasted—of how many years He went about teaching and doing good from His baptism to His death and passion—of the precise period of His ministry in which each event and each discourse recorded by the Evangelists took place,—and of the exact character of each period of that ministry? Now, that is what I want to show you, and it is a very important study for you, for the more you study the life of Christ as a whole, the more you will realise the true character of His ministry, and the real spirit of His teaching, and of the Christian Faith you ought to profess. You have now reached an age when this becomes a very profitable exercise for you—when it is as well that you should know something more of the history of the Gospels, and of the authority upon which the Gospel History rests, as well as enter more fully into the true character of our Saviour's life and teaching on earth, viewed as having at each period

a special purpose, tendency, and result; and I think you will find that this will clear up to you many points, the import and meaning of which you may have felt were a little difficult exactly to comprehend.

Now, when we proceed to give a continuous sketch of our Lord's life and ministry as recorded in the Gospels, we are met at once by more than one difficulty. You know that if any very distinguished person died, who had played an important part in the history of the world, or who had occupied such a great position in the literature of the world as to mould thought and affect the spirit of the age, we should expect that a life or biography of him would be written and published soon after his death, giving a complete and comprehensive view of his life and work. Much more should we expect this, if he announced himself as the Son of God, and the bearer to the world of a revelation from Heaven, and became the founder of a new religion; but instead of this we find that four lives of Christ have been handed down to us, and that each of these lives contains only a partial and incomplete account of the incidents of His life. You know that one of the writers of these lives tells us that "there are also many other things which Jesus did, the

which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (St. John xxi. 25). Each life therefore tells us but a small part of what Jesus Christ said and did while on earth, and we find they do not tell throughout the same things, and when they do narrate the same events they do not do so in the same order and connection.

Then there is another great difficulty, which is, that none of these lives, which we call the Gospels, were written till at least nearly thirty years after our Saviour's death, and the fourth Gospel, which enters most into the spiritual character of His ministry, and records the greatest number of the discourses He uttered, was not written till at least sixty years after His death; and we should naturally doubt whether a biographer now-a-days, writing so long after the death of the subject of it, even though he had been his companion, and was personally present at much that he said and did, would be able to write down accurately a complete record of it unless he had documents written at the time to help him.

How then can we be quite sure that we have in the Gospels an accurate record of the events of our Saviour's life, and, what is perhaps of greater import-

ance, of the exact words He uttered? I shall, however, try to show you that there is really no room for doubt as to this, and that you can perfectly depend upon the statements in the Gospels as absolutely true.

If you have never thought about this, you have probably hitherto simply accepted your New Testament as a divine and inspired record, without even inquiring how it is so, and have regarded the books of the New Testament as written in the precise order in which they are printed in your Bibles,—that the earliest book was the Gospel by St. Matthew, and the latest, the Book of Revelation. But this is not so; and I daresay you will be surprised when I tell you that six of the Epistles of St. Paul were written before any of the Gospels existed. These are the Epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Thessalonians. The oldest books in the New Testament are the Epistle of St. James and the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, and the latest, the Gospel and Epistles of St. John. These six Epistles of St. Paul are admitted even by the most hostile critics to be genuine works of the time in which they are said to have been written, which was about twenty years after our Saviour's death. Now we know that St. Paul was converted not many years after our

Saviour's death. Three years after he was further instructed in the Gospel history by two of the apostles, Peter, and James, the Lord's brother (Gal. i. 18, 19), and we do not find in these Epistles a single allusion to the events of our Saviour's life which is inconsistent with the facts recorded in the Gospels. On the contrary, they imply that these facts were well known, and even if the Gospels had never been written, we should find in these Epistles evidence of the leading characteristics of our Saviour's life and mission: that He was the Son of God, and both God and man—that He came down from heaven to reconcile a sinful world to God, and to redeem us from all iniquity—that He died on the cross for our sins—that He rose again on the third day—that He ascended to heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God, whence He will come again with great glory to judge both the quick and the dead.

There are, however, obvious reasons why we ought not to expect to find one comprehensive life of our Saviour written immediately after His death. One is, that such a life would not have been an efficient means of spreading the Gospel when the Church was not yet founded. In modern times such a life would no sooner have been written than it would have been

printed, and copies circulated in thousands. Thus you know when Luther translated the Bible into German, it was printed, and ere long a copy was in every one's hand, and at once a great revolution in human thought was effected; but when our Saviour lived there was no printer. Books were written in manuscript, and copies were laboriously made by the hand, at a great expense, the number of which was of course limited. The written manuscript was not therefore a suitable mode of bringing the Gospel home to the knowledge of all, both learned and unlearned. Then there were two languages spoken in Palestine, the Aramaic and a corrupted dialect of Greek, and many who understood the one did not understand the other.

Again, when we go over the events of our Saviour's life, you will find that His teaching and ministry were rejected by the upper and cultivated class among the Jews, and that He then turned to the unlearned class—the common people,—“who heard Him gladly.” It was from this class that the earliest converts were made, and from which the earliest Christian Church was formed, and among them the Gospel was spread, not by written documents, but by oral teaching. You will find that the mode adopted by our

Saviour in the second year of His ministry, after He had been rejected by the Pharisees, was to select twelve men from among His disciples who belonged to this class, to be witnesses of all He said and did, and to bear testimony to His work by oral preaching. You have probably wondered why our Saviour appointed unlearned fishermen of Galilee to be His apostles, and did not rather select them from among His more cultivated disciples. But this was the reason,—that they were fittest to bring the Gospel home to the hearts of those of the same class, and quite as able to speak in a simple and straightforward manner to what they had witnessed of our Saviour's acts and deeds, so as to convey an impression of the absolute truth of their testimony to such hearers; while afterwards, when the preaching of the Gospel was extended to the cultivated Gentiles, St. Paul, a man of learning, education, and intellect, was selected for the purpose. Thus St. Mark tells us that our Saviour appointed twelve, "that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach" (iii. 14); and when He was addressing them for the last time before His death, He gives them this precious promise, that "the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father

will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (St. John xiv. 26); and again, "The Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me, and ye also bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (St. John xv. 26, 27).

The apostles themselves fully recognised that their principal function was to bear witness to all that Christ said and did, and to preach from His words and actions the Kingdom of God, that is, the Gospel. Thus, immediately after the Ascension, when St. Peter assembled the brethren to appoint an apostle in room of Judas Iscariot, he says, "Of the men, therefore, which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto the day that He was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts i. 21, 22). Again, in what may be called the first great sermon preached by him, viz., that after Pentecost, he says, "This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts ii. 32); and again we are told, "And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."

Then, as to their function of preaching, we are told that when the effect of the great discourse at Pentecost was that "there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls," it is said that "they continued steadfast in the apostles' teaching and fellowship;" and when the apostles appointed seven men to attend to the daily ministrations, they add, "But we will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word" (Acts vi. 4).

There was therefore from the ascension of Christ a continuous worship of the Christian community, and a preaching of the Gospel by the apostles. We can fancy that, in the main, a sermon in those days, instead of being like a modern sermon, when a text is quoted from the written Word, and a comment and exhortation based upon it, would consist first of a statement of some act of our Saviour's life, or of some discourse uttered by Him, and an appeal to the living testimony of those who saw or heard it, upon which the teaching or doctrine would be based. That is, in few words, they preached from an oral and not a written Gospel. We have an apt illustration of this in the fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians—one of the

Epistles which preceded the written Gospels—when he says: “ Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein ye also stand, by which also ye are saved. . . . For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received (that is, orally), how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures.” The Scriptures here referred to were the prophecies in the Old Testament; but he does not refer to any written Gospel for the facts. On the contrary, he appeals to the testimony of living witnesses: “ He appeared unto Cephas; then to the twelve; then He appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain till now,” etc.; and then follows his great discourse upon the resurrection of the body.

The leading facts in our Saviour’s life, and the discourses which He uttered, were thus, in the regular worship and teaching at stated intervals of certainly not less than once a week, “ on the first day of the week, when Christians were gathered together to break bread ” (Acts xx. 7), repeated again and again, till they must have been familiar to the hearers, and

ingrained in their memory; and then, when the generation of living witnesses was passing away, the leading facts of this oral teaching were written down, so as to preserve the substance of their testimony to all succeeding ages.

This is exactly what St. Luke tells us, that “those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word,” delivered—that is, orally—the things or words in which they instructed their hearers; and then many took in hand to draw up a narrative of them, and St. Luke having traced the course of these things from the first, proceeded to “write them in order,” and in this way they came to be embodied in the first three Gospels, the oldest written by St. Matthew, himself an apostle; the next two by St. Mark and St. Luke, who were not themselves apostles, but the companions of them. St. Mark is mentioned by St. Peter in one of his Epistles as his son, that is, his disciple, who, according to an old tradition, derived his information from him; and St. Luke was certainly a disciple during the latter part of our Saviour’s life, and was associated with St. Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles. The former Gospels are written in the Hellenistic Greek, or dialect of Greek spoken

in Palestine, and were, no doubt, intended for the Jews; that by St. Luke, who was not a Jew, but a Greek proselyte, written in more classical Greek, was directed to the Gentiles; but all three may be held as having been written before the fall of Jerusalem, if not earlier, that is, from thirty to forty years after our Saviour's death.

Now you know that in our days when any celebrated man dies, who has given forth in his life many wise or witty sayings, these are told after his death, and repeated till they become stock anecdotes, and are told by every one almost in the same words; so no doubt it was with the pregnant sayings of our blessed Saviour, and we should expect to find that the well-known events of His life and the oft-repeated utterances of His lips would come to be told by the apostles in their addresses to the Christian assemblies almost in the same words, while, on the other hand, there would be little to show in what precise order the events took place in connection with which they were uttered,—just as you would find it difficult to arrange the events in consecutive order if you had to derive them solely from the Gospels read in the Communion Office. And this is exactly what we find in these three Gospels,—

great sameness in the narrative of the deeds and sayings of our Lord when repeated in more than one Gospel, but variety in the order in which they are told.

I will give you an illustration of this. Turn to St. Matthew viii. 19, and you will see that after healing the centurion's servant in Capernaum, and before crossing the sea of Galilee to the other side, when a great tempest arose, there came to Him a scribe, who said, "Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," and Jesus answers, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of heaven have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head," and another of His disciples says to Him, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father;" but Jesus says to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." Now turn to St. Luke vii. 2, and you will find the healing of the centurion's servant, and at viii. 22 the crossing over the sea of Galilee and the tempest, but between them there is no appearance of the incident S. Matthew relates. Go on, however, to ix. 57, and you will find it told, in almost the same words, as taking place after Jesus had finally left Galilee and was on His way to Jerusalem to the final scene of His crucifixion.

Here we see the two Evangelists agreeing almost *verbatim* in the narrative, as no doubt it had been made the subject of many a discourse, just as it is now, but differing as to the period when it happened. St. Matthew, however, does not profess to give the exact order, but rather groups our Saviour's sayings according to the subject, but St. Luke does profess to narrate them in order, and we can easily see that he has rightly placed the narrative, for at the time St. Matthew narrated it our Saviour was living in Capernaum, it was called His own city, and there He had His home, and it could not well be said that the Son of Man had not at that time where to lay His head, nor does there seem any reason why the delay to bury his father might not have been accorded to the other disciple; but when St. Luke records it, Jesus had finally left Capernaum, and had denounced it in forcible language for its want of faith. He was on His way to Jerusalem to His death, and, immediately before, a village of the Samaritans had refused to receive Him. He could therefore say most appropriately to the one that the Son of Man had not where to lay His head; and to the other, If you would be my disciple there is no time to be lost: you must follow me at once.

While these three Gospels were certainly written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, that is, about thirty years after our Saviour's death, so were also all the Epistles of St. Paul, St. Peter, St. James, and St. Jude; but this is not the case with the Gospel and the Epistles of St. John. The Book of Revelation was written by him also before the fall of Jerusalem, but the Gospel and the Epistles not till long after. We can see that this is the case from the difference in the language in which they are written. The Book of Revelation is written in the dialect of Greek spoken in Palestine, which was called Hellenistic Greek. Its main peculiarity is that it abounds in Hebrew idioms, and so was to a certain extent ungrammatical, but his Gospel and Epistles are written in comparatively pure Greek; and after the fall of Jerusalem St. John passed the latter years of his life in Ephesus, a city inhabited by cultivated Greeks, and his language naturally became purer after he left Palestine, and lived for many years among them, while his Gospel was mainly intended for their instruction. The great difference between the first three Gospels and the fourth is, that the former mainly records the events and sayings of our

Saviour's ministry in Galilee, while the latter deals more with the events in Judea and Jerusalem; and this is natural, for you must not suppose that our Saviour was accompanied on all occasions by the whole twelve apostles. The greater portion of them, including St. Matthew, who wrote the first Gospel, and St. Peter, who probably dictated the second, were natives of Galilee, and lived there, but others were Jews of Judea; and St. John, whether he was a native of Galilee or of Judea, was at all events a householder of Jerusalem; and, while the Galilean apostles would mainly accompany their Master in His journeys in Galilee, St. John seems to have been always with Him in Jerusalem, where his house would afford a home for Him; and you will see from what he says in the preface to his first Epistle that he tells us what he himself saw and heard. Further, as he wrote so long after the other Evangelists, he no doubt was acquainted with the first three Gospels, and therefore does not repeat much of what they had already told, but supplements them with that information which he was better fitted to convey. The tone of his mind, too, led him to enter more fully into the spirituality of our Lord's teaching and the elevation of His char-

acter; and it is very remarkable that the one of His apostles who most enjoyed familiar intercourse with Him in His human aspect, and was associated with Him in the warmest human love, is the one who most clearly and emphatically brings forward His essential divinity as the Word of God who came down from heaven, and dwelt among men in human form.

You must not be surprised that St. John should be able, at the distance of nearly sixty years after our Saviour's death, to record so minutely those long discourses which so characterise his Gospel, for no doubt he had himself heard them, and had throughout that long period repeated them again and again, and founded many an exhortation upon them, till every word was stamped upon his memory. I suppose there are few chapters in the New Testament from which so many sermons have been preached as the third chapter of his Gospel, containing His remarkable discourse to Nicodemus, which St. John no doubt heard;—and no wonder, for it contains, at the very outset of our Saviour's ministry, a very clear statement of what is substantially the whole Gospel; and so no doubt St. John had addressed his hearers over and over again from

the same narrative, and those who had heard him would recognise the accuracy with which it and other discourses are recorded in his Gospel.

One of the earliest notices we have of the service in the Primitive Church—that by Justin Martyr, born probably before St. John died, and who wrote in the first half of the second century—tells us that the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets were read as long as time permitted, and then the one who presided delivered a discourse, and he explains that what he calls in this passage “memoirs of the apostles” were the memoirs composed by them, “which are called Gospels,” and the reading of portions of which thus formed a stated part of the Sunday service. So in the apostolic Church the oral narrative would occupy the same position, and be repeated week after week; and when we add to this the precious promise that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance what our Saviour said and did, we may be very sure that in the written Gospels we have an authentic record of the wonderful events of His life and of the pregnant words which fell from His lips.

Lesson III.

THE SON OF MAN.

Read

ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL i. 5—80.

ST. MATTHEW i. 18—25 ; ST. LUKE ii. 1—38.

IF you will turn to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and the twenty-first verse, you will see that St. Peter describes "the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us" as "beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that He was received up from us," during which time the apostles were to be witnesses to all He said and did. This is, properly speaking, the Gospel history. It commences with the mission of John the Baptist. It terminates with the ascension of Jesus Christ. Now, if you turn to the Gospel by St. Mark, which you know is believed, and, I think, rightly believed, to have been written from information derived from St. Peter, you will find that it exactly corresponds with this description. It opens

with this announcement, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;" then follows the announcement from the prophet Isaiah, that a messenger would be sent to make ready the way of the Lord; and his narrative commences with "John came, who baptized in the wilderness," and it terminates with the ascension, which is described in the exact terms used by St. Peter: "So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven."

Though this is, strictly speaking, the Gospel history, it is natural that you should wish to know who John the Baptist really was, and how he was prepared for his mission. Jesus Christ, too, was not a mere man, but was also, as St. Mark says, the Son of God, and therefore you would equally wish to know how the Son of God was born into the world and assumed a human nature, and why He bore the name of Christ. This, no doubt, must have been the natural wish too of those early Christians for whom the Gospels were written, and it was essential that they should know this if they were rightly to apprehend the true nature of that great Teacher who came to preach the Gospel, and to bring life and immortality to light. Now,

an account of these essential preliminary facts to your rightly understanding the Gospel history is given to us by the other three Evangelists. St. Luke tells us of the birth of John the Baptist, and gives us an account of the virgin mother of Jesus Christ. He and St. Matthew narrate to us His birth and infancy, and St. John tells in what sense He was the Son of God, and of the pre-existence of His Divine nature.

The first of these particulars, then, is contained in that part of the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel which you have read, and which begins with the birth of John the Baptist. He was, St. Luke tells us, son of a priest called Zacharias. The priesthood among the Jews was confined to the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, who was appointed by God Himself to the priesthood, while the tribe of Levi was set apart for their service. The descendants of Aaron had, during the lapse of so many centuries, become very numerous, and they lived in different towns, or rather villages, in Judea set apart for them. Their duty was to conduct the services of the temple, which consisted of the sacrifice of a lamb every morning and evening, and of the special offerings and sacrifices required by the Levitical

law. They could not, of course, all attend at the temple at the same time, and so at this time they were divided into twenty-four groups or courses, and each group officiated for one week at the temple, so that each course officiated for one week twice in the year, and then the priests forming each group were selected by lot for the different duties they had to perform. Now St. Luke tells us that Zacharias belonged to the course of Abijah, which was the eighth group; and he adds that his wife was also descended from Aaron, and that her name was Elisabeth, or in Hebrew Elisheba, which was also the name of Aaron's wife. Then when they chose the priests by lot it fell to Zacharias to burn incense when he went into the temple, or rather the sanctuary. This was part of the service at both the morning and evening sacrifices. The altar of burnt-offerings stood in a court before the sanctuary, which consisted of two parts. The first, called the Holy Place, in which was placed an altar, called the golden altar, and on one side of it the great candlestick with seven branches, and on the other the table of shewbread. It was separated from the second division, called the Holy of Holies, by a curtain or veil, and in it was the ark of the covenant, the mercy-seat, with

the two cherubim, between which, in the earlier period of the Jewish history, the glory of God rested as a bright cloud. After the sacrifice, one of the priests entered the Holy Place and burnt incense on the altar, but no one was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies except the high priest once a year, on the Day of Atonement, by a door in the curtain, on the right side of the altar.

Now it was Zacharias's duty on this occasion to enter the Holy Place and burn incense on the altar. While thus engaged there suddenly appears to him an angel standing on the right side of the altar. As the entrance to the Holy of Holies was on the same side of the altar, it may be inferred that the angel emerged from thence. This angel announced himself as the angel Gabriel that stands in the presence of God, and that his message was from Him. This would recall to Zacharias's mind that it was the same angel who announced to Daniel the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (ix. 21). The name Gabriel in Hebrew means, A man of God. He tells Zacharias that his wife would have a son, whom he should call John, or in Hebrew Jehochanan, which means, "The Lord is gracious," and announces what his character and mission should be.

Zacharias doubted, not only because he and his wife were aged, but because he well understood what the angel meant when he told of the character and destiny of his son. He, as all cultivated Jews at that time, knew that the prophets of the Old Testament had foretold a glorious future for Israel, when a great king should appear, who was a scion of the house of David, whose throne He should fill, and of whose kingdom there should be no end, whom they had learned from the prophet Daniel to call the Messiah, or Anointed One, and he also knew that a messenger should go before Him to prepare the way of the Lord, and that the angel here used the language of the prophet Malachi: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers."

Zacharias must have understood from the angel's message that the reign of the Messiah was not far off, and that this boy was the predestined forerunner who should go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he asked, as the Jews afterwards asked when the Messiah did appear, for a sign. The sign given him was that he should be dumb

till the son was born. An appropriate sign, as, while it showed the people when he came forth that he had seen something which had paralysed his speech, he was unable to communicate what the vision had been till the proper time came.

Then, when he had completed his week of duty, he returned home. This was, as we afterwards learn, in the hill-country of Judea, that is, the hilly district which extends south of Jerusalem, and must have been one of the cities inhabited by the priests. There were nine cities in this district assigned to the priests, the principal of which was "Hebron, in the hill-country of Judea, with the suburbs thereof round about it" (Josh. xxi. 11), which is probably where he had his home.

Then in the sixth month after this the same angel Gabriel is sent to a city of Galilee called Nazareth. Galilee, as you will see from the map, was a district a long way to the north of Jerusalem, and was separated from Judea by the district of Samaria. In this town dwelt a virgin called Mary, or in Hebrew Miriam. She was betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph. He was of the house of David, that is, descended from him, and so was Mary, as they appear from a comparison of the

genealogies given by St. Matthew and St. Luke, to have been the children of two brothers, and so cousins-german to each other. The announcement to her was a still more momentous one. It was no other than that of her should be born the Messiah. Mary received this announcement in a different manner from Zacharias. She knew that it was prophesied that the Messiah should be born of a virgin, and should have no earthly father, and that He should fill the throne of David, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and accepted at once the assurance that she was to be that favoured one; but she could not understand how this could be if He had no earthly father. And the angel told her that she should have a son, and should call His name Jesus, which is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "Jehovah the Saviour," that He should be called the Son of the Highest, and God would give Him the throne of His father David, or, in other words, He would be the Messiah. Then, when Mary asked how this could be, he told her that the Holy Spirit should come upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadow her, and thus that He would be perfectly holy, and that God Himself would be His Father. As an evidence that nothing

was impossible with God, he announced that Elisabeth, who was her cousin, would have a son in her old age. Mary then accepted the announcement as true, and submitted herself to the will of God. Her natural impulse under this great revelation was to withdraw herself from the circle of her friends and acquaintances in Nazareth, and to confer with her cousin Elisabeth as to the blessings promised to both. She accordingly hastened to visit her cousin. A long journey it was from Nazareth in Galilee to the town in the hill-country where Elisabeth dwelt. She had to pass through the whole of Samaria, and nearly the whole of Judea, leaving Jerusalem behind her.

You may fancy what the meeting between the two cousins must have been. The one in the immediate expectation of the birth of a son who was to be the forerunner of the Messiah, and the other selected from among all the women of Judea to be the mother of the promised Deliverer. This was the great ambition of every Jewish woman, the hope that lay at the heart of every Jewish maiden, that she might possibly be the mother of the Messiah, and this hope was realised in Mary, and her cousin Elisabeth recognised that it was so.

It is no wonder that she called her blessed among women, and the mother of her Lord, and that Mary herself broke out in that great song of praise which we call the *Magnificat*. Her thoughts seem to have reverted to an event in the history of her people similar to that of Elisabeth, when Hannah prayed earnestly for a son whom she vowed to devote to the service of God, and her prayer was answered in the birth of Samuel the prophet. Hannah likewise burst forth with a song of praise, and if you compare the *Magnificat* with that song as it is recorded in the First Book of Samuel, you will be surprised to see how close some of the expressions in the two songs are to each other. Mary remained in retirement with her cousin in the city of the priests for three months, and then returned to Nazareth just before the birth of Elisabeth's son. It was the custom among the Jews to name a child at its circumcision, a ceremony which took place according to the law on the eighth day, just as it is our custom to name a child at its baptism, and as Zacharias was dumb, they proposed to call the child after its father, but Elisabeth knew that the child was to be called John, as directed by the angel, which was confirmed by

Zacharias, and having thus fulfilled the direction of the angel, his dumbness was removed, and he too broke out in an inspired song of praise, in which he fully recognised that his son was to be the prophet who was to go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, as had been foretold, while the circumstances attending his birth led to an expectation among all the inhabitants of the hill-country that he would be no ordinary child.

We must now turn to St. Matthew to know what passed after Mary had returned to Nazareth. The time had then come when her espoused husband Joseph had to take her home to his own house. By the Jewish law no woman of Israel was married unless she had first been espoused, and this was a formal act performed before witnesses. Then, after some space of time, the espoused husband brought her home to him. This time had now come, and then Joseph became aware that his espoused wife was with child. He of course concluded that some other man was its father. This was a great offence, and by the Jewish law was punishable by death, but the husband could save the woman from that punishment if he gave her a bill of divorce, so that she ceased to be his espoused wife. This was the

course which Joseph resolved upon. "He was minded not to make her a public example, but to put her away privily," and he did so, "being a just man." This would seem to us to be a strange reason. Our notion of justice would rather imply that he would exact the full penalty for the offence. This is man's justice, but not God's. According to God's idea justice is tempered with mercy. He is a God who can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly, and so a just man in that sense is one that will be merciful and considerate towards offenders, and take the most merciful course whenever allowance can be made. Mary, from what we read of her, must have exhibited a character of remarkable purity and holiness, and Joseph therefore resolved to take the more merciful course, when a revelation was made to him by an angel who appeared to him in a dream, telling him not to fear to take Mary home to his house, as the Child had no earthly father, but was of the Holy Ghost, and that He should save His people from their sins, that is, would be the promised Messiah. Then Joseph took her home to his house, but respected her position by remaining apart from her till Jesus was born.

St. Matthew tells us that this was the fulfilment

of a prophecy of Isaiah (vii. 14), that a virgin should have a son, and that his name should be called Immanuel, that is, God with us, which was in truth Jesus' character; but another prophecy, that of Micah (v. 2), foretelling that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, seemed unlikely to be fulfilled, as Joseph and Mary had their home in Nazareth, a city of Galilee. It was however fulfilled in an unexpected manner, for an order was issued by the Emperor of Rome requiring a general census or numbering of the population of the empire to take place. Judea was at this time still a kingdom under Herod, but it had been subdued by the Romans, B.C. 63, and Herod held the kingdom in dependence upon the Roman Emperor. It was therefore bound to pay tribute to Rome, and, being subject to taxation, this decree applied to Judea as well as to the rest of the empire. The numbering of the population in Judea had, however, to be made according to the Jewish tribes, and to the houses which composed them; and each member of the tribe or house had to go to its original seat. Now both Joseph and Mary belonged to the house of King David, and Bethlehem was the city of David, as you will see from the sixteenth chapter

of the First Book of Samuel, where Jesse, the father of King David, is called the Bethlehemite, and Bethlehem was his home. When Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem, which lies about six miles south of Jerusalem, they found the inn already filled by others of the same house or tribe. According to Ezra (ii. 21), at the return from Babylon the children of Bethlehem, or house of David, amounted to 123 persons, and would now be greatly more numerous. Their journey from Galilee was comparatively a long one, and they would naturally be the last comers. You must not however suppose that an Eastern inn in those days was like our modern hotels. They no doubt resembled the caravanserais which now exist for the accommodation of travellers in Eastern countries. They were empty houses, of one story, surrounding a court into which the rooms opened, and were without furniture or attendants. The travellers brought their own bedding, and took possession of the vacant rooms, supplying themselves with provisions. Joseph and Mary then found all the rooms occupied, and no place left in which they could find shelter, except a stable, where they established themselves; and here Jesus was born, and laid in what had been the manger of the

stable. An ancient tradition in the second century relates that the birth of Jesus took place in a cavern, and there is nothing improbable in a cavern having been used as a stable. A cavern was afterwards pointed out as the scene of the nativity, and a Christian church was built over it in the beginning of the fourth century. It can still be identified, and is shown to travellers.

It was not likely that the birth of One who was to be the Saviour of the world should pass without some remarkable announcement of the event, and this was very appropriately made to shepherds, near Bethlehem, as David, when selected to rule over Israel, had himself been tending sheep at the same place. Large flocks of sheep had to be brought from the surrounding country to Jerusalem to supply victims for the daily sacrifices, and those from the hill-country, in the south of Judea, remained a night at Bethlehem, where they were watched by the shepherds a little way north of the town, where there was a tower for their protection; and, as they were watching at night, the glory of the Lord shone around them. This they would at once recognise as the *Shechinah*, or cloud of dazzling brightness, well known to the Jews as the

glory of God, from which proceeded what was called the *Bathkol*, or voice from heaven, which you know is more than once mentioned in the Bible, and they were naturally filled with awe and fear when the angel of the Lord announced to them the birth, in the city of David, or Bethlehem, of a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord—or, as it must have been in the original, Jehovah the Messiah; for *Christos*, or Christ, is a Greek word, which has the same meaning of Anointed as the Hebrew word Messiah, and is a translation of that word,—and that they would find the Babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger. And there was heard a multitude of the heavenly host uttering that earliest Christian hymn of praise, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will toward men.” The shepherds accordingly went to Bethlehem, and, recognising the Babe according to the sign given them by the angel, made it known to all the neighbourhood, and returned glorifying and praising God.

There were now two ceremonies which Mary and her Child had to go through under the Jewish law. These you will find in the Book of Leviticus (xii.). When a Jewish woman had a male child she was held to be unclean, and had to remain apart for seven

days. On the eighth day the child was circumcised, and after three-and-thirty days the mother was purified by offering at the door of the tabernacle a year-old lamb for a burnt-offering, and a young pigeon or turtle-dove for a sin-offering. Accordingly St. Luke tells us that when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the Child, His name was called Jesus, just as the name is given to a Christian child at its baptism, and that when the days of her purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, Mary brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice according to the law. Every first-born male child was held to belong to the Lord, and had to be redeemed by a payment to the temple, as you will see in the Book of Exodus (xiii. 2), and Numbers (xviii.); but it was only presented to the Lord provided it was fit to be a priest, that is, free from spot or blemish of any kind, and it is probably in reference to this custom that Christ is said, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to have offered Himself without spot to God (ix. 14). When the Child was thus presented to the Lord at Jerusalem, two remarkable testimonies were given to His being the promised Messiah. One was from a devout man called Simeon, who was

“waiting for the consolation of Israel,” that is, expecting the coming of the Messiah at this time, and it had been revealed to him that he should not die till he had seen Him. He had come to the temple as Jesus was presented, and, recognising in the Child the promised Deliverer, took Jesus in his arms, and broke out in that touching hymn, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,” etc.; and so thoroughly did he realise in the spirit the true character of the Messiah’s coming, that he foreshadows, as you will see in verses 34 and 35, His rejection and crucifixion by the Jews. The second testimony was by Anna, a prophetess, who had been a widow even for about eighty-four years, and served God day and night in the temple. She too gave thanks likewise to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem, that is, expecting the coming of the Messiah.

Lesson III.
THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Read

ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL ii. 1—23.

YOU recollect that in our last lesson we saw from St. Luke's narrative that there were devout people among the Jews who were living in the expectation that the promised Messiah would be manifested at this time, and under the influence of the Spirit, or from direct revelation from Heaven, recognised Him in the Child born of Mary at Bethlehem, so now you see from St. Matthew's narrative that the same expectation existed at this time among the wise men of other nations. These wise men, or Magi, as they were called, were the priests of a heathen nation from whom sprung the Persians, and who inhabited the country east of Judea, and beyond the river Tigris. You may think it strange that they should know anything about the promised Deliverer of the race of Israel, but this expectation had probably been derived from a prophecy uttered

by a prophet who came from the same country in contact with the Israelites, many centuries before. This was Balaam, who had been sent for by Balak, king of the Amorites, to curse the armies of Israel, and told Balak that he would advertise him what that people would do to his people in the battle. This was his prophecy :—"There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies ; and Israel shall do valiantly. Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city" (Numbers xxiv. 17-19).

This prophecy had probably become known among his countrymen, with whom he ranked as a prophet, and led to a general belief that out of Israel would rise a future ruler of the world, and that his birth would be signalised by the appearance of a remarkable star. These Magi or wise men of the East were likewise great astrologers. The difference between an astrologer and an astronomer is that the latter studies the position and motion of the heavenly bodies as a matter of science, while

the former considers that the heavenly bodies influence the character and fortunes of both nations and individuals upon earth, and that by watching their course in the heavens, it is possible to foretell events on the earth. It was this superstitious belief that first led to the study of the heavenly bodies, and astrology thus preceded astronomy. Astrologers divided the stars into fixed and moveable. The latter are what we now call planets, but they did not know that the earth was also a planet, but thought it presented a flat surface in the centre of the universe. Of course this belief made no difference in the aspect of the heavens, and they believed that certain groups of fixed stars or constellations, especially those through which the sun appeared to pass, and which are called signs of the zodiac, were associated with certain countries, that the position of the moveable stars or planets in these constellations indicated future events in the nations which they represented, and that their position in the heavens at the time a child was born indicated its character and fortunes, so that both could be foretold. How the belief arose we do not know, but these wise men came to associate the people of Israel with the sign of the zodiac called Pisces, or the

Fishes, and that when the only three planets then known that are further from the sun than this earth, viz. Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, came together in that constellation, it would reveal the birth of the future King that was to be born among the Jews, and to rule over the whole world. They may have been led to this belief by the fact that a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in this constellation was believed to have taken place three years before the birth of Moses, and now three years before the death of Herod this conjunction again took place, and was joined by the third planet a year after. This they appear to have thought was the star prophesied by Balaam, and three of these wise men resolved to go to Judea, and ascertain if they could trace any signs of the future ruler of the world having been born there. It was in the last year of Herod's reign that they came to Jerusalem, and told the Jews that they had seen His star in the East, and asked where He was to be found. This reached Herod's ears, who became alarmed lest his family should cease to reign, and he sent for the chief priests, and asked where it was prophesied that the Messiah would be born, and they answered In Bethlehem. This prophecy you will find in the

prophecies of Micah (v. 2). Then he sent for the wise men, and asked them when the star or conjunction had appeared, to which they must have answered, About two years before. He also desired them to go to Bethlehem and search for the Child, and when they had found Him to let him know, that he might also go and worship Him; but this was not his real purpose, which was to remove the object of his fear by destroying Him. Then, as they went to Bethlehem, which was only six miles, they saw what they thought was the same star, which appeared to go before them and stand over the house where the young Child was; and there they found Him and worshipped Him, offering gifts according to the Eastern custom. This star, however, must either have been a meteor first appearing in the same part of the heavens, or a miraculous appearance sent to guide them to the place where the Child was. At the same time they received a warning not to return to Herod, and went back to their own country by a different route. Herod waited for them in vain, hoping that he might receive such information as would enable him to destroy the Child; and, in his rage at being disappointed, resolved upon a deed of great wickedness, by which he might accomplish his

design. The wise men had told him that the star had first appeared nearly two years before, and he ordered every male child in Bethlehem, "from two years old and under," to be slain, to make sure that the holy Child would be included. But Joseph had likewise received his warning, and, before this dreadful order could be executed, had fled to Egypt by night with the young Child and His mother, where he remained till he heard of Herod's death, when he returned to the land of Israel.

You will see from this narrative that our Saviour was born in the last year of Herod's reign, and as we know exactly when Herod died, this gives us the year of our Saviour's birth. You will naturally think that we ought to know that already from the years of the Christian era being calculated from His birth, but this mode of counting years was not introduced till six centuries after our Saviour's birth, and the person who calculated it made a mistake of four years, making the first year to correspond with the year 753 after the foundation of Rome, instead of 750, when Herod actually died, about the time of the Jewish Passover, in April.

We can also calculate with some probability at what period of the year our Saviour was born. We

celebrate His birth on the 25th December, which we call Christmas Day. But His birth was celebrated on this day in the Western Church only, and it was not introduced till three hundred years after Christ. In the Eastern Church it was celebrated on the 6th of January, which is our Epiphany.

Now we can see from the narrative that the annunciation to the Virgin Mary was just six months after the announcement to Zacharias. Well, in that year the priests of the course of Abijah were on duty twice in the year, from 17th to 23d April and 3d to 9th October. Therefore the annunciation to Mary was either from 17th to 23d July, or from 3d to 9th January; and if Jesus was born nine months after, His birth would fall either between 17th to 23d January or 3d to 9th October.

It is obvious, then, that the Eastern festival on the 6th January comes nearest to the time. The reason that the 25th December was fixed by the Western Church probably was that it was a Pagan festival connected with the winter solstice, called the "Birth of the New Sun," when the days began to grow longer, and the policy of the Western Church was to supersede the Pagan festivals by placing Christian festivals on the same days.

The territories over which Herod had ruled as king were now divided among his three sons, who ruled over them, not as kings, but as tetrarchs ; and it will enable you better to understand some of the events in the life of our Saviour if you recollect what this division was. Archelaus, one of his sons, ruled over Judea, Idumea, which lay south of it, and Samaria, which bordered it on the north. Herod Antigonus had Galilee, which bordered with Samaria on the north, and Peræa, which was separated from Judea and Samaria by the Jordan ; and Philip had the country separated from Galilee by the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. Archelaus was the worst of his father's sons, and resembled him in disposition, and therefore Joseph did not return to Bethlehem, but went to Galilee, and settled at Nazareth, his original home ; and here St. Matthew terminates his narrative of the infancy of our Saviour, and what further we know of His boyhood we learn from St. Luke alone, who likewise tells us that Mary and her Child returned to Nazareth (ii. 51).

You cannot have failed to observe in reading these chapters that to obtain a complete account of our Saviour's birth, and the events connected with

it, we are obliged to combine the two narratives given by St. Matthew and St. Luke, and that neither of them tells us precisely the same story. They are obviously independent accounts, and this will naturally lead you to ask,—How did St. Matthew and St. Luke know about these events, which happened at least thirty years before either of them became disciples of Christ, and from what source did they derive their information? These are very important questions, as, unless we accurately know how He was born into the world, we cannot form a just conception of His true character and relation to God. Now, you will see at once that if St. Matthew and St. Luke derived their account of it from different persons, each of whom told the story as it mainly interested or affected them, then it is quite natural that there should be this difference in the narrative. Now look at St. Matthew's account. The leading person in it is Joseph, and the incidents told are those leading features of the story in which he was mainly concerned. Then turn to St. Luke's account, and there you find that all the events centre round the Virgin Mary, and that they are told as they affect her. But I think we may go further than this, and say that some things St.

Matthew tells could only have been known to Joseph, and must originally have been told by him, and that much of what St. Luke tells could only have been known to Mary, and must have been told by her.

Jesus was brought up in the family of Joseph and Mary, and, to the world at large, must have passed as their child; but Joseph knew that he was not His real father, but could have known nothing of all the circumstances connected with His miraculous birth, unless Mary had told him. On the other hand, the mother must have been deeply impressed by all these miraculous events, and must have treasured them up in her memory. Then, when St. Matthew tells us that Joseph was minded to put her away privately; that he was warned in a dream not to do so, and was told that the Child was conceived of the Holy Ghost; that he was again warned in a dream that Herod sought the Child's life, and that he obeyed an angel's command when he took the Child and His mother into Egypt, and, when he returned, avoided Bethlehem and returned to Nazareth,—how could these things be known if they had not been told by Joseph, after Jesus had begun His public ministry, as what had mainly impressed him? Then, when we turn to the

narrative of St. Luke, we find every event grouped around Mary and her cousin Elisabeth. She alone could tell of the annunciation by the angel, of her hasty visit to her cousin, of what her cousin alone could tell her of the birth of John the Baptist, of how she wrapped her first-born Son, when born, in swaddling-clothes, and laid Him in a manger, of how she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart (ii. 18, 19), and how, when Jesus as a boy went down with them to Nazareth, and was subject unto them, His mother kept all these sayings in her heart (ver. 51). She alone could have told these things. We can see then that the narrative given by St. Matthew must have been originally derived from Joseph himself, and that of St. Luke from Mary. The question then is, How did they reach these two Evangelists so as to be recorded by them with so much plainness and minuteness, and evidently not to have been got from mere hearsay?

Joseph's home was Nazareth, in Galilee, where he appears to have been well known as the carpenter of the village; and I must tell you that every Jew, in whatever station of life he was, was obliged to learn a trade, and it in no way derogated from his

position that he worked at it. St. Matthew's home was on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, not many miles from it. He was a publican, or collector of taxes, and therefore a man of education. The two families must therefore, in all probability, have been acquainted, but Joseph was, to all appearance, dead when St. Matthew was called to be an apostle, and it was not likely that he should, before his call, have known anything of these events. But Joseph had a family of sons and daughters, and the sons are called by St. Matthew the brethren of our Lord. They were in reality His half-brethren. Their names were James and Joses, and Simon and Judas. Among these brethren, as Jesus grew up, though subject to His reputed parents, He must have lived separate in spirit and character, and no doubt excited much wonder in their minds as to why He was so different. Was He really their brother, or, if only their half-brother, who was His father? James, as the eldest, was the future head of the family, and it was only natural that Joseph before he died would confide to him those facts connected with His birth, which St. Matthew has related, and the tender regard towards his mother which they evince would be very appro-

priate in such a communication to his son. He, however, if Joseph told him all St. Matthew relates, did not believe that the youth who had lived in the family, and had been brought up with him, had been conceived by the Holy Ghost, as, when Jesus called Himself the Son of God, it is said that His brethren did not believe in Him; but when Jesus showed Himself to James after His resurrection, and thus convinced him of His Divine character, this would recall to his mind what he had been told of His birth; and as James became the bishop of the first Christian church at Jerusalem, this would be peculiarly the tradition of that church, and become known to St. Matthew, who wrote his Gospel especially for the Hebrews. Such at least is a very natural supposition of how he derived his information. That of St. Luke could hardly have been otherwise than directly obtained from Mary herself. When Jesus hung upon the cross, as you will learn afterwards, and saw His mother and St. John standing at the foot of it, He said to St. John, "Behold thy mother," and to Mary, "Behold thy son." This is told to us by St. John himself, and he adds that, from that hour, he took her to his own house (St. John xix. 27). Now, St. Luke tells us in his

Gospel that Jesus appeared after His resurrection to two disciples who were going to Emmaus, and he says that Jesus, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (St. Luke xxiv. 27). This is told us by St. Luke alone. He names one of the disciples as Cleopas, but he does not name the other, and, as it was usual with the Evangelists not to name themselves, we may conclude that it was St. Luke himself. Then, in the Acts of the Apostles, which St. Luke also wrote, he mentions, at the first meeting of the disciples after the ascension, that Mary the mother of Jesus was present, and that the disciples then in Jerusalem amounted to one hundred and twenty, which, no doubt, included himself. Nothing would be more natural than that he should apply to Mary herself for the particulars of the miraculous birth of our Saviour. That he wrote his account from what was told him by one who belonged to the people of the Jews appears from a little circumstance that would naturally escape your notice. St. Luke was not a Jew, but was a Greek physician. Now the Greeks counted their day as we do, from midnight to midnight, and would talk as we do of the night following the day

but the Jews counted their day from sunset to sunset, which they usually reckoned from six o'clock in the evening to six o'clock the next evening, and this, you should recollect, because it is the clue to much that appears inconsistent in the first three Gospels, and to some of the apparent contradictions between them and the Gospel of St. John, who, from long residence at Ephesus, had adopted the Greek mode of counting the day. The Jews then said night and day, not day and night as we do. Thus, in Genesis it is the evening and the morning, not the morning and the evening, that make the day. Now you may recollect that St. Luke, telling us of Anna the prophetess, says she "had been a widow about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers, night and day" (ii. 37). That is the language of a Jew, and not of a Gentile, and St. Luke must obviously have written down this narrative from the lips of a Jew, otherwise he would not so have expressed himself; but from whose lips could he have written such a narrative save from those of the Virgin Mary herself?

St. Luke, however, not only tells us the events connected with our Saviour's birth, which could

only have been derived from the Virgin Mary herself, but he records at length three songs of praise,—the first uttered by herself, the other two by Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, and by the aged Simeon. These, however, St. Luke must also have taken from the lips of one of the Jewish people, for the language of the first, I have already shown you, was taken in a great measure from the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in the Old Testament, and the language of the other two contain allusions which a Jew only would make. That Mary should have recollected every word of them we may well suppose, for it is obvious from the narrative that during the whole of our Saviour's youth, while she saw His mysterious characteristics developing year after year, she pondered over every incident connected with His birth and youth in her heart, and we can well believe that, just as some of you spend many an hour repeating and singing your favourite hymns, she would find a constant pleasure and consolation in repeating to herself these songs of praise, and when the agony and despair which possessed her heart when she saw her Son dying on the cross was changed to the ecstasy and joyful faith in the Divine character of her Son by His

resurrection from the dead, what more natural than that she should have burst forth again in these early songs of praise, and that their echo should have been caught up by the infant Church ?

These three songs appear under the name of Canticles in our Church of England service,—the second, called the *Benedictus*, in the morning prayer, and the first and third, called the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc dimittis*, in the evening prayer, and they no doubt, along with the Psalms, were adopted into the very earliest service of the Christian Church, with which all its members from the very first would be quite familiar.

Lesson IV.
THE SON OF GOD.

Read

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL i. 1—18.

ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL ii. 40—52.

THE chapters in the Gospels of St. Luke and St. Matthew which we have read, when combined, give us a full account of the human birth of Jesus,—that He was the son of Mary, but had no human father, having been conceived by the Holy Ghost, so that the holy Child born of her was called the Son of the Highest; but though they show us that thus the Divine nature was united with a human nature in His person, they tell us nothing more of how this was so. This was reserved for St. John, who wrote much later, and supplemented the narrative of the three earlier Gospels to lift the veil which shadowed this mysterious union, and tell us something of the pre-existence of that Divine person who took our nature upon Him in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is not easy for us, who look back through

eighteen centuries to the life of our Saviour upon earth, every event of which has been hallowed to us by our Church's teaching, and by so many associations connected with our worship, to realise vividly to ourselves the great difficulty which His disciples must have experienced who witnessed His human life upon earth, and were associated with Him in all its ordinary features, to feel that He was, in point of fact, God manifest in the flesh. And yet St. John, who had been most familiarly connected with Him in His human life, and most closely united to Him in the bonds of human affection, is the one who was most powerfully impressed with His essential Divinity; but he seems to have entered more into His spiritual character than the other Evangelists, and, while they record mainly the events of His life, the miracles He performed, and such teaching as the Sermon on the Mount, he dwells more upon His discourses, and seems to have hung with a passionate earnestness upon every word that fell from His lips, and attached the fullest weight to every utterance He gave as to His Divine mission and character. There is nothing unreasonable in supposing that he may have written them down at the time, and he could hardly have entered into their full meaning without recognising the fact that He

claimed to be the eternal Son of God, and one with the Father, and that it was this claim which led to His rejection by the Pharisees, and ultimately to His crucifixion. St. John records how the Pharisees, after the discourse which followed the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, wished to put Him to death because He made Himself equal with God (v. 18);—how, in the discourse after the feeding of the five thousand, because He said that He was from God, had come down from heaven, and would again ascend where He was before, many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him (vi. 66);—how, when He asked His disciples who they thought He was, and when Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus said that flesh and blood had not revealed it unto him, but His Father in heaven (St. Matt. xvi. 17);—how, a few days afterwards, he saw Him in His glory at the Mount of Transfiguration;—how, on the way to Gethsemane, St. John records the saying of Jesus, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go to the Father” (xvi. 28), and was present in the high priest’s palace when He was condemned, because, in answer to the solemn adjuration of the high priest, He admitted that He was the Christ, the Son of

God (xviii. 15; St. Matt. xxvi. 63). Then, when He was declared, by His resurrection from the dead, to be the Son of God with power, he was present when it extracted from the doubting Thomas the utterance which he records of "My Lord and my God" (xx. 28).

But besides this deep persuasion, derived from these incidents, St. John had been favoured many years before he wrote his Gospel by a special revelation made to him in the island of Patmos, where he had been banished by the Emperor Nero "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," and Jesus appeared to him in His glorified body, and said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, that is, the first and the last, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. i. 8); and in one of the visions which followed, he saw "heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat thereon was called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. And His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns; and He had a name written, that no man knew but He Himself: and He was clothed with a vesture dipt in blood: and His name is called The Word of God" (xix. 11). So St. John, under this deep persuasion that the

Being he had known as Jesus was essentially God as well as man, and under the influence of these revelations of His Divine character, threw himself back in mind to the eternal existence of the Son of God, and commences his Gospel with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

What period does St. John refer to when he uses the expression, "In the beginning"? He knew that with God there is neither beginning nor end. God has existed from all eternity, and will exist to all eternity. With God there is neither past nor future, but one eternal present. Time, therefore, as a measure of eternity, can only be reckoned when something external to God exists, and so it has its beginning when creation has its beginning. You recollect the opening sentence of the Bible is "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The expression there is used in precisely the same sense. In the remarkable and deeply instructive prayer which Jesus uttered in the hearing of His disciples, just before entering the Garden of Gethsemane, St. John records this expression which he heard, and which embodies the same, "And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine

own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (xvii. 5); and again, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (ver. 24); and St. John beholds in spirit the Son of God in His glory before the creation of the world; He was then with God, and was God. Then comes also the question, In what sense does St. John here call Him the Word? You know that if you wish to give expression to the thoughts within you, or to the sentiments you feel, and to communicate them to others, you can only do so through the use of language. Without language one person could not know what passes in the mind of another. Words represent thoughts or ideas, and you can only communicate the thought or idea through the word. Now you will find, I think, the clue to St. John's meaning in verse 18, where he says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." The idea runs through the whole of the discourses of Jesus, that it is through the Son that the Father manifests Himself both in action and in

revelation of His own purposes, and in this sense the Son declares Him. He manifests Himself through Him in creation when it is said in verse 3, "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." And St. John is not the only apostle to express this truth, for St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, which was written long before St. John wrote his Gospel, expresses this truth even more broadly when he says, "For by Him," that is, the Son of God, "were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" (Col. i. 16, 17).

But the Son also declares the Father by revealing to us God's essential character, His thoughts as regards men, and His purposes towards them full of love and mercy, and in this sense it is said that Jesus "has brought life and immortality to light" (2 Tim. i. 10), and so St. John says, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men: and the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not," that is it shone in a world lying

in sin and darkness, and those who would not receive it, or wilfully rejected it, remained in that darkness. The four following verses form a sort of parenthesis, the force of which you will better see when we come to speak of John the Baptist; but St. John goes on to explain in what sense the light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not. His explanation is that the Word was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." What St. John apparently means is, that though the world was made by Him, the world did not recognise Him, and that though He came especially to God's own people the Jews, yet they did not acknowledge Him, and then he tells what He did for those who did receive Him. He tells us that to receive Him was to believe on His name, and by His name is meant here His character and attributes as the 'Son of God, just as in the Old Testament, when Moses besought God to show him His glory, He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee" (Ex. xxxiii. 19), and then afterwards the Lord descended in a cloud and proclaimed the name of the Lord, "and the Lord

passed by and proclaimed, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. xxxiv. 5, 6). That was what is meant by His name. Then the privilege that He will bestow on those who believe on His name is that they have power to become the sons of God, not in the same sense that Jesus was the Son of God, for He was the only-begotten Son, that is, of the same substance as His Father, but because in that case they were, in a sense, born again in the spirit, or entering into a new life, and that new birth was the work of God, and not a natural birth, or produced by the will of man. Then St. John tells us how the Word of God came into the world, that He was made flesh and dwelt among us. How He became flesh is told us in the narrative we have just been considering, as given us by St. Matthew and St. Luke. The Holy Ghost came upon a pure virgin of the daughters of Israel, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her, and the holy Thing born of her was the Son of God, receiving from her His human nature. The word used by St. John for human

nature is *flesh*, which in Latin is *carnis*, and from that word is formed the word *incarnation*, which may be familiar to you as the theological term expressive of the Son of God taking upon Him the human nature. This word, in our Nicene Creed, is expressed by the phrase, "He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man," and St. John adds that He was full of grace and truth. Then you must omit the next verse, which is parenthetical and connected with verse 19, and pass on to verse 16—"And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." There is here a contrast between the Jews who were under the law of Moses, and under an obligation to obey that law in every particular, and those who believed on the name of the Son of God, for out of His fulness they received grace and truth, that is, the spiritual life acquired by faith in Christ, and the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, with regard to the purposes of God towards man, and the salvation wrought for them by the obedience and death of His Son.

You will, no doubt, have observed a very peculiar expression in the next verse with regard to the Son

of God. He is called the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father. As I told you already, the expression "only begotten" implies that He was not merely a Son of God in a spiritual sense, but in a much higher and peculiar sense, viz. that He was of the same nature and substance as His Father, just as a son naturally born is of the same substance as his father, and so He was with God, and was God; but what was meant by saying He was in the bosom of the Father? That is applying language to God which is only appropriate to man, but I think the idea which was in the mind of St. John is not difficult to trace. You know that the greatest, probably the purest, happiness we can possess on earth is derived from our affections. What, in the way of earthly enjoyment, could compensate us for an unloved and unloving existence? But to love others and to be loved by them is one of the greatest sources of happiness we possess. Now St. John was the beloved disciple, the one whom Jesus above all loved, and who loved Him above all in return, and when at the last supper, before He was offered up, as He reclined with His disciples round the table, and St. John reclined on the couch before Him, and lay with his head

on Jesus' bosom, that was probably the happiest moment in his life. But love is of all others the attribute ascribed to God, and the one which the Son of God most emphatically declared on earth as an essential feature of His Divine character, and He too, we are warranted from all His dealings with man in believing, finds His highest delight in loving; but love without an object on which to lavish it is inoperative, and when the Word was with God in the beginning before the world was, it found its highest and most perfect exercise in the eternal love between the Father and the Son, and St. John seems, in the recollection of that hour when "he was leaning on Jesus' bosom," to have been unable to find any better mode of expressing that eternal love than that the only begotten Son was in the bosom of the Father, and with this beautiful expression St. John ends his account of the pre-existence and incarnation of the Son of God.

Of the life of Jesus before He entered upon His public ministry, and announced Himself to the Jews as their Messiah, we are told very little, and probably because all that could be recorded would be a holy and blameless life, and a silent and gradual preparation for the great work before Him; and this

is implied when St. Luke tells us that "the Child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him;" but in the part of the chapter you have just read, he records one striking incident in His youth when He reached what was a very important age to all young Jewish boys. When Jewish boys reached the age of twelve, they commenced their attendance at the three great festivals, and their instruction in the Law. They were then called "Sons of the Law." The three great festivals were the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, and every male Jew was bound to go up to Jerusalem to celebrate these feasts in the temple. You will find an account of them in the sixteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, and it will be necessary that you should keep it in mind in reading the Gospels, in order to understand some of the events. The Passover Feast and the Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days, Pentecost one day only. They were connected primarily with the harvest, and also had a higher meaning, celebrating events connected with the early history of the people. The Passover was held on the fourteenth day of the first month of their sacred year. The Jewish months were lunar months, and it

commenced at the first new moon after the vernal equinox, at the time of the barley harvest, and likewise commemorated that event which preceded their being brought out of the land of Egypt, when they were commanded to slay and eat a lamb, and to sprinkle its blood on the door-posts, so that the destroying angel might pass over their dwellings; and in every household at this feast the paschal lamb was slain and the passover supper was held. The Feast of Weeks was held fifty days after, when the wheat was ripe, when a sheaf of wheat, called the first-fruits, was waved before the Lord, and also commemorated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, which took place fifty days after the Israelites left Egypt. The Feast of Tabernacles was held at the time of the vine harvest, and was held on the fifteenth day of the seventh month; the Jews who attended it dwelt in booths or tabernacles made of the branches of trees, in commemoration of their dwelling in tents in the wilderness.

If you will refer to the sixteenth verse of the sixteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, you will see it there commanded that "Three times in the year shall all thy males appear before the Lord God in the place which the Lord God shall choose," which was after-

wards the temple at Jerusalem, "in the feast of unleavened bread (or the Passover), and in the feast of weeks (or Pentecost), and in the feast of tabernacles;" but in the time of our Saviour it was not thought incumbent on Jews living far from Jerusalem to appear there oftener than once in the year at one of the great festivals, and this was usually the Passover. So St. Luke tells that the parents of Jesus "went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover." It was, comparatively speaking, a long journey from Galilee, and they no doubt joined in company with all the Jews of Galilee who went to the feast, and formed what would now be called a caravan. As Jesus was now twelve years old, they took Him with them to keep the feast for the first time. When the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread were over, the caravan returned to Galilee, and Joseph and Mary, though Jesus had remained behind, concluded He was with some of the other Jews in the caravan, but when they halted for the night they found He was not there, and returned to Jerusalem in search of Him, and after seeking Him in vain for three days—that is, one day going on their journey, another day returning, and one day in Jerusalem,—they thought of going to the

temple, and there they found Him sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. These doctors, or rabbis as they were called, sat in the court of the temple, and their scholars sat on the ground, and their usual mode of instruction was that one of the rabbis read the law, and the scholars asked questions with regard to any points of difficulty. It was usual on the morning that they were to depart to their own home, to go first to the temple and to worship the Lord, and Jesus, who had never before been brought into contact with the rabbis, wished to hear more from them, and so remained behind, and in the crowd gathered together on such an occasion was not missed. St. Luke says that all who heard were astonished at His understanding and His answers. In her annoyance Mary reproached Him inconsiderately, saying, "Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." His answer is not correctly rendered in our version, and is corrected in the Revised Version: "And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be"—not "about My Father's business," but—"in My Father's house?" Mary, in her haste, forgot

the true nature of her Son, and inadvertently calls Joseph His father. The meaning of His answer is, How did you forget whose Son I really am? If you had recollected that Joseph is not My father, but God, you would have sought Me in My true Father's house—the temple of God. But, notwithstanding the miraculous circumstances which Mary well knew accompanied His birth, to recognise the Son of God in the boy of twelve who hitherto lived in family with His half-brothers and sisters, was more than their human understanding could grasp; but Mary, as was her wont, did not overlook His answer, but added it to those remarkable features of His life which she pondered in her heart. Jesus then returned to Nazareth with them, and, as St. Luke tells, was subject unto them, thus giving a perfect example of that honour and reverence to His parents which became a youth of His age.

St. Luke adds that “He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man;” that is, that His human intellect developed with His physical growth, and that He presented a life of absolute sinlessness and blamelessness, living among His half-brothers and sisters as a holy and contemplative youth—in the family, but not of it.

Of John the Baptist, during the same period of youth, St. Luke merely says, that "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel" (i. 80).

The home of his father and mother was in the hill-country of Judea, a hilly region in the centre of the country south of Jerusalem; and between that hilly district and the Dead Sea was the wilderness of Judea, a barren region, full of rocky hills and bare defiles, with here and there a more fertile spot, and its only inhabitants were small communities of a sect of the Jews, called Essenes, who led a solitary and strict life of self-denial, temperance, and labour.

John was the son of a priest, and entitled himself to the priesthood, but it is probable that when he likewise attained the age of twelve, instead of being placed under the rabbis for instruction in law, the prophecy of the angel as to his future self-denying character led to his then joining a community of Essenes in the wilderness, and being trained by them in their strict and ascetic mode of life.

There is now a pause in the narrative, and we learn no more of the youth of John and of Jesus, which remains shrouded under the veil cast over it, no doubt for wise purposes.

And so it remained till they reached the next important era in the age of a Jewish youth—his thirtieth year—when those destined for the priesthood were consecrated to their office.

It is then that the Gospel history, to use the language of St. Peter, properly speaking commences, or, to use the language of St. Luke, the day of John's showing himself to Israel arrived.

THE GOSPEL HISTORY.



PART I.

OPENING PERIOD OF HIS TEACHING.

JESUS AND THE PHARISEES.



Lesson V.

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN.

Read

ST. LUKE iii. 1—18.

THE time had now come when John was to show himself to Israel as the forerunner of the Messiah, which is the true commencement of the Gospel History; and St. Luke, as you will see, considered it so important a date that he marks it with great distinctness. It was the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius Cæsar, who began to reign jointly with the Emperor Augustus in the year 765 after the foundation of Rome, or the twelfth year of the Christian era, and thus it would fall in the year of the foundation of Rome 779, or the year of the Christian era 26. The Jewish year, however, was

reckoned from the first month of their lunar year, called Nisan. It was the month in which the Passover fell, and which corresponded with either March or April, and therefore we may consider that St. Luke places the commencement of the preaching of John the Baptist sometime between March, in which the Passover fell in the year 26, and April, in which it fell in the year 27. With this the other dates which he gives us quite correspond. You may recollect that Herod the Great was succeeded in Judea and Samaria by his son Archelaus, and that it was in consequence of his character as a ruler that Joseph returned to Nazareth in Galilee, instead of remaining in Bethlehem. This Archelaus ruled for ten years, and was then deposed by the Emperor Augustus, and his territories were formed into a Roman province, and governed by a Roman procurator. Pontius Pilate was the sixth of these procurators, and was appointed in the preceding year. Herod Antipas, another son of Herod the Great, was still tetrarch of Galilee and Peræa on the east side of the Jordan; and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, consisting of the districts called Iturea, Trachonitis,

Paneas, and Batanæa; and north of it was Abilene, of which Lysanias was tetrarch. This was the state of the whole region of Palestine or the Holy Land at the commencement of the Gospel History, and you will understand the narrative better by bearing it in mind from the first. St. Luke, however, adds that Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests at that time, and it is necessary that I should explain what will appear to you a strange statement, for you cannot have read that part of the Pentateuch which contains the regulations regarding the priesthood among the Jews without observing that there could be but one High Priest at the same time; and after Judea became a Roman province, the High Priests were appointed by the Roman Governor. Annas had been appointed High Priest some years previously, and had held the High-Priesthood for seven years, from the year 7 to the year 14, when he was deposed, and another person appointed High Priest. His daughter, however, had married Joseph Caiaphas, and he was appointed High Priest in the year 25, so that he was at this time the High Priest. The Great Council of the Jews, which consisted of seventy-one persons, and was called the Sanhedrim, had a

president called the Nasi, who was at this time equal in dignity to the High Priest, and acted as his deputy or substitute. This president was Annas, and having been formerly High Priest, he is here associated by St. Luke with Caiaphas; and you will see afterwards that, so far as power and authority are concerned, he actually shared that dignity with him.

St. Luke then tells us that, during the time of these rulers, when John was in the wilderness, an arid and barren part of country which extended from Jerusalem and the hill-country of Judea on the west, to the Jordan and the Dead Sea on the east, the word of God came to him. John was at this time thirty years old, and St. Luke calls him here son of Zacharias, because his father was a priest; and the children of the priests, when they reached the age of thirty—the age at which the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were consecrated—were to be installed and enrolled into the service of the temple; their names and the name of their father being entered there. But you will recollect that, besides the priests, a very important class of men are mentioned in the Old Testament who played a great part in the history of the Jews.

These were the Prophets, who were the channel through whom God communicated His will to the people of Israel, and who were inspired by Him both to signify His purposes to them and to prophesy future events in their history. It was from the inspired prophecies uttered by them that the expectation of a Messiah who was to found a future kingdom of righteousness arose. Now this expression, "The word of God came to them," is the usual language by which this prophetic inspiration is signified. Thus we are told in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, "Then came the word of the Lord (or of Jehovah) to Israel, saying," etc. (xxxviii. 4). In the Prophecies of Jeremiah the same expression occurs very frequently, and also in Ezekiel. Daniel says that he "understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (ix. 2); and if you look at the beginning of the Prophecies of Hosea, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, and Malachi, you will see that they all commence with the expression, "the word of the Lord that came to the prophet." So when we are told "The word of God came to John," the meaning

is that he was endowed with the spirit of prophecy. There had been no prophet in Israel since Malachi, who prophesied about four hundred years before the Christian era; but Malachi himself had prophesied that God would send His messenger to prepare the way of the Messiah (iii. 2); and now after that interval John was commissioned as that prophetic messenger to announce the coming of His kingdom; and he came, as St. Luke tells us, into "all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;" and how he preached it is told us by St. Matthew, who adds, "and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (iii. 2).

There was nothing in what John preached which the Jews who heard him did not understand. They knew that by the kingdom of heaven was meant that kingdom of the Messiah which He would found at His coming, and which the Old Testament prophets, and especially Daniel, had foretold; and they were not surprised when John coupled with that announcement baptism and repentance as necessary for those who were to enter that kingdom. Baptism was a rite well known to the Jews. Their own children were admitted to the Covenant of God

with Israel by the rite of Circumcision ; but strangers who became converted to a belief in the God of Israel, and who were called Proselytes, were admitted by baptism, as a sign that they were cleansed from their heathen idolatry, and adopted the Jewish faith as new creatures ; and to the Jews it appeared as no unusual rite to mark their passing from their existing state into the kingdom of the Messiah. It was also a belief among the Jews at that time, founded upon the frequent occurrence in the Old Testament prophecies that they would in that day return to the Lord their God, and hearken to His voice, and seek the Lord their God, and find Him, if they sought with all their heart, that repentance was necessary to the reception of the Messiah. In one of their books it is said, "If Israel shall repent but one day, forthwith the Redeemer cometh."

St. Matthew tells us "that there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (iii. 5, 6); and St. Luke tells us that he said to the multitude who came forth to be baptized of him, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

He calls them a generation of vipers, because they had made void the law of God by their traditions, and, while professing great strictness in keeping the law with all the superstitious observances they had added to it, they were, in fact, leading lives full of iniquity, and were utterly devoid of true righteousness; and by "the wrath to come" he probably referred to the closing words of the Old Testament, where Malachi, prophesying that Elijah, when he came, would "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers," adds, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

What, then, should have brought such a people to accept at once, in such numbers, John's prophecy that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and to profess repentance for their sins, and be baptized into that kingdom? This arose from a general expectation that the time had come when the Messiah would appear, an expectation which was founded upon that prophecy of Daniel, delivered during the captivity at Babylon, which appeared to indicate the time that would elapse before the Messiah appeared. He says, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth

of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem, unto the Messiah the Prince, shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks" (ix. 25). By this expression ordinary weeks are not meant. The word in the original is "sevens," and the Jews had two periods of "sevens, or weeks,"—one of days, ending with the Sabbath, or day of rest, and one of years, ending with the Sabbatical year, or year of rest. You will find this very clearly stated in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus: "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard" (3, 4). Now this period of seven sevens and threescore and two sevens, or sixty-nine sevens in all, were periods of seven years, and amounted to four hundred and eighty-three years. The commandment to restore and build Jerusalem after the Captivity you will find narrated in the seventh chapter of the Book of Ezra. We are told that it was "in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king." This was the year 457 before the Christian era. Now if you will deduct 457 from 483, you will arrive at the year of the

Christian era which, according to this calculation, the prophecy indicated as the year of Messiah the Prince, and that is the year 26, or the very year when John began to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This calculation from the prophecy of Daniel had become a firm persuasion of the people, and it was no wonder, when the report that a remarkable man had made his appearance in the wilderness, startling all those who heard him with this announcement, that multitudes flocked to him, submitting to the rite of baptism, and making that confession of sin and repentance which they considered to be indispensable if they were to enter the Messiah's kingdom.

Among those who first came in great numbers, and whom he called a generation of vipers, were, according to St. Matthew, many of the Pharisees and Sadducees. These were the two parties into which the upper class among the Jews were divided, and as they are constantly mentioned during the course of the Gospel history, it is as well that you should know at once something about them. The Pharisees made a great outward profession of a minute obedience to the law, but they had added to the law, as contained

in the Books of the Law, or the Five Books of Moses, an oral or unwritten law, consisting of minute observances, which practically made the great precepts of the law of none effect, and attached the greatest importance to an exact fulfilment of them. They also made a great profession and loud exhibition of religion, while their actual lives and practices were at variance with the great principles of the moral law. What they boasted of was, therefore, an outward righteousness made up of strict conformity to all the minute and, in fact, childish rules of their oral law, while they neglected the weightier matters required by the moral law of God,—judgment, and the love of God, or, as St. Matthew says, judgment, mercy, and faith.

The Sadducees were the opposite of these. They admitted the authority of the written law only, and rejected the oral or unwritten law, but they took the written law in its more narrow and literal sense, and denied the existence of angels and spirits, as well as the resurrection and the immortality of the soul.

The Pharisees were thus the fanatical, and the Sadducees the secular, party among the Jews.

It was no doubt mainly to the Pharisees, when

they came to be baptized, that John said that their repentance must be real; that they must not rest upon their outward privileges as the children of Abraham, that is, as belonging to the chosen people; but show by their acts that they really confessed their sins, and repented of them, and he warned them that "the axe was laid unto the roots of the trees: every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire," that is, that judgment now impended over Jerusalem and the people of the Jews, and that unless their repentance was genuine, and they entered the kingdom of the Messiah as true penitents, destruction would come upon them. When they asked by what acts they were to show their repentance, he said, by substituting for a narrow self-righteousness a large-hearted charity towards others, which would manifest itself in acts of benevolence.

Another class of people came to him who were called Publicans. These were persons employed by the Romans to gather the tributes and customs in those countries and provinces under their dominion, and in the Roman province of Judea they were mainly Jews. They were held in little esteem by the Jews, who hated everything connected with the

dominion of the Romans, and were in most unwilling subjection to them. By the Jews, therefore, and to the Pharisees especially, these publicans were regarded as apostate Jews, who had taken service with the enemy, assisted in maintaining an alien power, and were not admitted to ordinary intercourse with them. These publicans probably collected the taxes on a system very common both then and subsequently, by which they farmed the revenue, that is, undertook to pay a fixed sum for each district committed to their charge, with full power to indemnify themselves by the taxes paid to them by the people. But this naturally led to the temptation to enrich themselves by exacting more from the people by violence than they were really bound to pay, and thus receiving a larger sum than they had to pay to their Roman masters. This mode of collecting the taxes still prevails in those countries, including Palestine, now subject to the Turks, and is the source of much oppression of the unfortunate peasantry, and so it was in the time of the Gospel history; and to them John said, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you."

Then soldiers asked him, What shall we do? As Judea formed part of a Roman province, the

soldiers there were of course Roman soldiers, but it is not to be supposed that these could have come to be baptized. John, however, is said to have come into all the country about Jordan, that is, the regions on both sides of it; and the district on the east side of the Jordan, which was called Peræa, was no part of the Roman province, but formed part of the country governed by Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, where he had a strong fortress called Machærus, and these were probably his soldiers. His government was a cruel and tyrannical one, and these soldiers were no doubt employed in enforcing his rule. John therefore tells them to do violence to no man. The Greek word used for violence was generally applied to violence used by irregular troops to extort money or provisions. He further tells them not to accuse any falsely, that is, to act as informers against innocent people with a view to extort money, but to be content with their wages or pay. That such soldiers should have come to him shows how deep and general must have been the expectation among the Jews that the time had come when the promised Messiah was to appear; and the impression produced upon them by the character and teaching of

John was so great that it led to much communing in their own hearts as to whether he might not himself be the Messiah, or, as St. Luke says, the Christ, which is simply the translation of that term into Greek, for both names mean "the Anointed." Wherever, therefore, the Greek term, the Christ, occurs in the Gospels, you must understand it as meaning the Messiah foretold by the Old Testament prophets. They appear to have put the question to John, and his answer is a remarkable one, for, instead of simply telling them he was not the Christ, but His forerunner, he shows them that if they had kept in mind what the prophets had foretold regarding the times of the Messiah, they might have seen that He was not yet come, though the time of His coming was at hand, for one great characteristic of that time was that the Spirit of God would then be poured out upon the people, and the law would be written upon their hearts. Thus Isaiah says of that time, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring" (xliv. 3). Ezekiel also says of that day, "Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God" (xxxix. 29); and Joel

says: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit" (ii. 28). John calls their attention to the fact that he only baptized them with water, a baptism with which they were already well acquainted, and the character and effect of which they knew. It was simply an outward ordinance signifying the repentance of the people and their submission to a different form of religion. But he tells them that the One they were looking for would be One much mightier than himself, so much greater that he was not worthy to perform towards Him the office of a slave to his master, and to unloose His sandals; that His baptism was an inward ordinance, a baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire, and that the effect of that baptism would be a purifying one, like fire, separating the dross from the genuine matter, and would resemble the action of separating the grain from the chaff on the threshing-floor of the East. The sheaves of corn were thrown upon the floor and trodden out by oxen. A large winnowing fan was

then used to bring upon them a strong current of air, which drove the chaff to the outskirts, to be afterwards swept up and burnt, while the grain was left in the middle. The great characteristic of the kingdom of the Messiah was to be the outpouring of the Spirit of God, and its effects would be similar. Those who received it, and submitted themselves to its influence, would be regenerated, and become children of the kingdom, but those who resisted and rejected it would become hardened in their sinful course, and be cast out of the kingdom, sharing the doom impending over the Jews if they rejected the Messiah when He came.

Now if you will turn to the Acts of the Apostles, you will see that this prophecy, that the promised Messiah when He came would baptize with the Holy Spirit, was fulfilled after the resurrection of Jesus, when He founded His Church, for we are told that to the apostles "He showed Himself alive after His Passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: and, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have

heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (i. 3-5); and "when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (ii. 1-4). This was the fulfilment of the prophecy of John, that the One mightier than he would baptize with the Holy Ghost and fire, like the strong blast produced by the winnowing fan; and St. Peter, in the address which followed, declared that this was also the fulfilment of the prophecy of the prophet Joel (ii. 16), and that if his hearers would repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, they too would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call;" and then "they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (ii. 38-41),—who thus were added to the Church, that is, the Kingdom of Heaven.

Lesson VII.

THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF JESUS.

Read

ST. MATTHEW iii. 13—17.

ST. LUKE iii. 23 ; iv. 1—13.

THE One mightier than John whose coming he had announced was now to appear on the scene. This was Jesus of Nazareth. We know nothing of His history after He was presented at the temple when twelve years old, except what St. Luke tells us, that He dwelt at Nazareth, subject unto Joseph and His mother, and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man ; but when John began to announce that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, He knew that the time had come when He was to enter upon His mission. He therefore left His home in Galilee and came to the Jordan, where John was baptizing, to be baptized of him. John appears to have been alone when this request was made to him, and to have been much startled by it. He probably did not know that

Jesus was the promised Messiah, for a sign had been given him by which he would recognise Him when He came. St. John tells us what this sign was: "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost" (i. 33); and till he saw that sign he could not recognise Him, but he knew that Jesus had led a life of singular purity and absolute holiness, and was not a fit subject for a baptism of repentance intended for those who led a sinful and worldly life, and not for one who had no sins to repent of, and therefore he forbade Him; but Jesus said, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." What He meant by this may have been that it was part of His mission to fulfil the whole law of God, and to submit to every ordinance to which the Jews were liable; but He probably had a deeper meaning, viz. to be consecrated by this rite to His priestly office. Every priest when consecrated to his office was baptized with water and anointed with oil. This you will see from the eighth chapter of the Book of Leviticus, where we find the record of the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests: "And Moses brought

Aaron and his sons, and washed them with water” (verse 6); “and he poured of the anointing oil upon Aaron’s head, and anointed him, to sanctify him” (verse 12). Jesus probably knew He was to be anointed by the descent of the Holy Spirit—of which oil was the symbol—upon His head; and that Isaiah prophetically refers to this when he says: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called Trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified” (lxi. 1-3): thus submitting to baptism as the initiatory rite. Then St. Matthew tells us, that while the Jews were baptized of Him, confessing their sins, Jesus, when He was baptized, went *straightway* out of the water, for He had no sins

to confess, and then "the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him, and heard a voice from heaven," or rather out of the heavens, "saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." John then knew that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and the Son of God, the object of His Father's love, whom He regarded with complacency; and when St. Luke adds to his account of the baptism and the descent of the Holy Ghost the words, "and Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age," or rather, as it is more correctly rendered in the Revised Version, "and Jesus Himself, when He began to teach, was about thirty years of age," he may well be supposed to allude to the fact that He, like John, had reached the age when the Jewish priests were consecrated to their office.

The effects produced upon Jesus by this outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon Him were great and immediate. It led, in the first place, to an uncontrollable impulse to fly from the presence of man and seek an entire solitude, where He would find Himself alone with God. To use the striking language of St. Mark: "And immediately the Spirit

driveth Him into the wilderness" (i. 12). This was the wilderness between the Jordan and Jerusalem, where John had been preaching, and parts of which were wild, barren, and solitary, consisting of steep slopes of bare limestone, furrowed by deep, rugged chasms, rather than valleys, without trees or grass, a stream or fountain, and where, as St. Mark says, "He was with the wild beasts." Tradition identifies the scene in a barren and sombre valley, lined by low hills and rugged rocks, one of which is called Quarantania, or the Mount of Temptation, where all was frightful desolation; and here Jesus remained under this overpowering feeling, forty days and nights without tasting food. This was not a voluntary fast practised from religious motives, as it is often represented; but you know that under any very overpowering emotion, such as poignant grief, passionate love, or mental anxiety and distress, the natural wants of the body seem to be suspended, and there is a cessation of the ordinary craving for food, which is rather viewed with loathing. It is impossible for us to estimate what the effect of such a powerful influence as the entire possession of the whole being by the Spirit of God would be, for St. Luke says, "He was full of the Holy Ghost;" but

that the immediate presence of God might produce a cessation of the natural cravings of the body, for so long a period as forty days, we learn from those instances of it recorded in the Old Testament, as taking place in the persons of Moses and Elijah. Moses appears, on two different occasions, when in the presence of God, to have fasted forty days and nights. The first time was when he went up into Mount Sinai to receive the first tables of stone, "and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day He called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights" (Exod. xxiv. 15-18). But that he fasted during that time is distinctly stated in the Book of Deuteronomy, when he tells the people of Israel: "When I was gone up into the mount, to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights; I

neither did eat bread nor drink water." "And it came to pass, at the end of the forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant" (ix. 9, 11). The second time was after he had broken the first tables of stone, on finding the Israelites worshipping the golden calf, and received the law a second time. You will find this in the thirty-fourth chapter of the Book of Exodus. You will see that when Moses went up into Mount Sinai to receive the law, "and the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there," it is said, "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water: and He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" (ver. 28). And this too is stated in the same chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy: "And I fell down before the Lord, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread nor drink water" (ver. 18). Then if you turn to the nineteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, you will see that when Elijah fled from before Ahab, king of Israel, and went to Horeb, the mount of God, which is the same as Mount Sinai, when the Lord came to him, after he had gone a day's journey into

the wilderness, he was twice miraculously fed by an angel, "because the journey is too great for thee;" he then went "in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mount of God" (verses 4-8).

That Jesus had no craving for food during that long period is implied when St. Luke says, "And when they were ended, he afterward hungered." The human nature of Jesus could bear this exalted influence no longer, and then it was that the devil endeavoured to tempt Him to distrust His mission as the Son of God when the reaction had come. The devil had no doubt heard the voice from heaven announcing that this was the beloved Son of God; but as he had in the garden of Eden tempted Eve, by persuading her to doubt the reality of the Divine commandment, and presenting powerful inducements to her to disregard it, so in a similar manner he endeavoured to instil into the mind of Jesus a doubt as to His being the Son of God; but Jesus met His temptations in the way that all such temptations should be met,—by an appeal to the Word of God and His revealed will.

The temptation in the wilderness was threefold. First, that Jesus should test His power as the Son of

God by commanding the stones to be made bread to satisfy His hunger, so that, if He had failed to work this miracle, He might doubt the reality of the Divine announcement, just as he tempted Eve to doubt whether she should surely die if she ate of the forbidden fruit; but Jesus answered, "It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." Then he took Jesus unto an high mountain, or, as St. Matthew calls it, "an exceeding high mountain," and showed all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and offered to give Him the power and the glory of them if He would fall down and worship him. The expression, "an exceeding high mountain," is one that can only apply to the highest mountain in Palestine, which was Mount Hermon, at its northern frontier. It is 10,000 feet high, and its summit is covered with eternal snow. From it there is an extensive prospect over all the regions round about, and it is probable that the devil, knowing that the Jews expected the kingdom of the Messiah to be an earthly kingdom of great power and glory, tempted Jesus, by the prospect of this being at once realised to Him, provided He would hold it, not of God, but of the devil, as the prince of this world. But Jesus

rebuked him, and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." Failing in these two temptations by the appeal which Jesus made to the Word of God, Satan based his third upon an appeal by himself to the same Word. He placed Jesus upon the pinnacle of the temple, and said, "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence : for it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee ; and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." This passage is taken from the ninety-first Psalm, which no doubt refers to the Messiah (verses 11, 12). This was a subtle temptation, for Jesus might well regard it as a promise upon which He could rely, but He knew that to make an unnecessary and wilful trial of its efficacy was an abuse of God's promises, and He answered, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Then we are told that, when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season ; an indication that, though He had defeated Satan on this occasion with the sword of the Spirit, His conflict with the power of evil was not over, but would be renewed,

as we shall find, at a subsequent period. It is remarkable, as you will see, that the passages of the Word of God quoted by Jesus are all taken from the Book of Deuteronomy. You will find them by referring, for the first to the eighth chapter, verse 3, and for the two last to the sixth chapter, verses 13 and 16.

You will doubtless have observed, in the course of our reading, that this is the first mention in the Gospels of the name of the devil, and it is perhaps as well that I should now tell you what the New Testament says about him. The name occurs four times in the Old Testament, but there it is a translation of two very different Hebrew words—one meaning literally, the hairy one (Lev. xvii. 7; 2 Chron. ii. 15), and the other meaning spoiler or destroyer (Deut. xxxii. 17; Ps. cvi. 37); in these passages you will see at once that it is applied to the local deities worshipped by the heathen in opposition to the true God. But in the New Testament the name devil is derived from a Greek word signifying accuser, calumniator. He is identified by St. John, in the Book of Revelation, with the serpent who tempted our first parents in the garden of Eden. If you will turn to the twelfth chapter you

will find him called "the great dragon, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world" (ver. 9), and again in the twentieth chapter he is called "the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan" (ver. 2). Jesus gives him the same name when He says, "Get thee behind Me, Satan." He was that personification of evil who caused the fall of man in the garden of Eden by his subtlety, and now attempted, by similar temptation, to divert the Redeemer of the world from His mission. He was successful in the first, and failed in the second; but as the first pair had fallen a prey to his wiles, it was necessary that the promised Saviour should be subjected to and withstand the same trial. The name Satan comes from a Hebrew word signifying the hater, accuser, and under this name he appears in the Book of Job, also in the twenty-first chapter of the First Book of Chronicles (ver. 1), in the hundred and ninth Psalm (ver. 6), and in the third chapter of the Book of the Prophet Zechariah (vers. 1, 2).

What the New Testament tells us of him is that he is "the prince of this world" (St. John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11), and "the prince of the power of

the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. ii. 2); that he is the adversary of the human race (1 Peter v. 8), and has "the power of death" (Heb. ii. 14), and "oppresses with disease" (St. Luke xiii. 16; Acts ix. 38); that "he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (St. John viii. 44); that he puts it into the hearts of men to commit sin, and deceives them with wiles and snares; and then he is "the accuser of our brethren," "which accuseth them before our God day and night" (Rev. xii. 10). Why such a power of evil exists, and how he possesses the means of working such evil upon human beings is not revealed to us, but that he is a reality cannot be doubted, and operates in two ways, either by an invisible influence upon the human heart, or by a visible appearance and open temptation. The former is the usual influence implied by what is said of him in the New Testament, and that Jesus during the forty days' fast was subjected to it may be inferred from St. Mark, when he says, "He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan" (i. 13);

but as he tempted our first parents in a visible shape under the form of a serpent, so when St. Matthew says that "He afterward hungered, and the tempter came and said unto Him," etc. (iv. 2, 3), he seems to have thus appeared to Jesus in a visible form, and directly assailed Him with those three temptations which St. Matthew and St. Luke have recorded.

In both instances he began by instilling a doubt of the truth of God's declarations to man, and a perversion of His Word. To Eve the serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die;" and to Jesus the devil said, "If Thou be the Son of God." Then the three special temptations were somewhat similar. Eve saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise. Jesus was tempted, when an-hungred after His forty days' fast, to satisfy His appetite by a miracle; the kingdoms of the earth were exhibited to Him, and He was offered the possession of them. He was urged to exhibit His exalted position as the Son of God, by casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and being borne up by angels.

Now this is just very much the character of the

temptations by which human beings are assailed. The devil instils into their minds a doubt of the truth of God's declarations in Scripture, and the reality of the promises and threatenings it contains, and the world offers its allurements in a similar form. St. John says: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 St. John ii. 15-17). Here the allurements of the world are presented to us likewise in a threefold aspect, with very similar characteristics. The lust of the flesh, that is, sensuality or the gratification of the animal passions and appetites; the lust of the eyes, that is, covetousness or the desire of riches and worldly possessions, which the Scriptures tell us is idolatry; the pride of life, that is, presumption or the assertion of the human will in opposition to that of God. The opposite virtues are temperance, contentment with the lot assigned to us by God, and humility.

Our first parents yielded to the temptations of

the serpent, and fell. Jesus, who came to redeem the human race from the consequences of the Fall, was attacked by the same temptations, and resisted the devil. He did so by appealing to the Word of God as contained in the Scriptures, and by entire submission to the will of God. So St. John indicates that to love God and to do the will of God is the mode by which these temptations must be resisted; and St. Paul says, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places;" and he tells us that the armour of God is truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. vi. 11-17).

Now, if you will turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews, you will there see that the temptations which Jesus resisted, and to which we are all exposed, were the same, and that His having suffered them Himself, and resisted them, is a ground of hope on our part that He will help us likewise to

resist them. Look at chapter ii. verse 17 : "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted;" and again, in chapter iv. verse 14, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Lesson VII.

JESUS THE LAMB OF GOD.

Read

ST. JOHN i. 15, 19—51 ; ii. 1—12.

THIS part of the Gospel of St. John which you have just read contains all that St. John tells us about John the Baptist. He says nothing about his beginning to preach in the wilderness, nothing about the Pharisees and the publicans and the soldiers coming to be baptized, nothing about the baptism of Jesus and of His temptation in the wilderness. What he tells us is simply the record which John bore to Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Messiah. Now the reason of this is, that St. John undertook to declare only what he had himself seen and heard, as you will see from the opening verses of his First Epistle. St. John had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and the time when St. John takes up his history indicates no doubt the exact period in his mission when St. John became his disciple. He had not himself seen

and heard what went before, but he was present when John gave the testimony regarding Jesus which he records. He says, "These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing," implying that the things which preceded them, and which St. John does not mention, were done when John was baptizing at a different place. Now the name Bethabara in our authorised translation does not occur in the original text. It is there, not Bethabara, but Bethania, and it is therefore rightly rendered in the Revised Version, "Bethany beyond Jordan." This was certainly the name in the original; but one of the early Fathers of the Church, who knew of no Bethany but the village near Jerusalem, but had heard of a ford on the Jordan called Bethabara, or rather Betharabah, concluded that it was a mistake, and inserted that name instead, and it was adopted in subsequent manuscripts. There was, however, a region beyond the Jordan which bore a name so close to this that we can hardly doubt that it was the place meant.

The Jordan, as you know, issues out of the Sea of Galilee, flows into the Dead Sea, and forms the boundary on the east of the southern part of Galilee, then of the whole of Samaria, and then of

Judea. It was in that part of the Jordan which is near the Dead Sea that John was first baptizing, and it was there that Jesus was baptized, because that is the only part of the river which bounds the wilderness of Judea. It was there that the place called Bethabara was supposed to be. It was where the children of Israel crossed under Joshua, near Jericho; but on the east bank of that part of the Jordan which flows out of the Sea of Galilee lay a region which was part of the ancient kingdom of Basan. Now, to this region the Romans gave the name of Batanæa, and this is probably the name meant by the Bethania of St. John, and there was here a ford called Abarah.

John, therefore, after the Baptism of Jesus, had proceeded along the east bank of the Jordan northwards until he approached towards the Sea of Galilee, and it was here he was now baptizing when St. John was with him as a disciple, and it was here that he gave the record of Jesus which St. John narrates. There was, as I think you know, a great council in Jerusalem called the Sanhedrim, which consisted of seventy-one members, and one of the functions of this council was the scrutiny and judging of a prophet,—that is, if any one called

himself a prophet, and claimed for his utterances the sanction of the Spirit of prophecy, the Sanhedrim tested his pretensions, and decided whether he was to be regarded as a true prophet or not. The preaching of John had now exerted such general attention that the council could no longer refrain from taking cognisance of it, and before they could decide as to whether he possessed the genuine spirit of prophecy or not, they resolved to send to him a deputation of priests and Levites. The general expectation, too, that the time had come when the promised Messiah would appear, led to a question as to whether he might not himself be the Messiah. The deputation consisted of priests and Levites,—that is, those engaged in the service of the temple. They belonged to the sect of the Pharisees, and came to him here by crossing the Jordan near Jericho, and passing along the east bank of the river, for they would avoid the only other route through Samaria from the hostile feelings between the Jews and the Samaritans. They asked him who he professed himself to be, and John at once told them that he was not the Messiah. They then asked him whether he was Elias or Elijah. The reason they put this question to him was

because Malachi, the last of the prophets, closes his prophecy with these words: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (iv. 5). Now Elijah, if you recollect, did not die, but was taken bodily up to heaven in a chariot of fire. By the day of the Lord the Jews understood the time of the coming of the Messiah. They regarded Elijah as still alive, and believed that he would then come in his bodily form before the appearance of the Messiah, and thought John might be he; but John replied that in this sense he was not Elijah. Then they asked him if he was that prophet, not if he was a prophet, but if he was a special prophet, who might thus be expected. The prophet they referred to is mentioned in the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, where Moses says to Israel, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (ver. 15); and again the Lord said: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee,

and will put My words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words, which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him" (ver. 18, 19).

This prophecy refers to the Messiah, and John answered that he was not that prophet. Having exhausted all their own suppositions, they then asked him to declare to them at once who he professed himself to be, that they might report his answer to the Sanhedrim, and he told them that he was the person referred to by the prophet Isaiah, in his fortieth chapter, as "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (ver. 3),—a prophecy which referred to him as the precursor of the Messiah.

The deputation then asked him how he came to baptize if he was not the Messiah, or even His forerunner Elijah, or the prophet foretold to Moses. The reason they put the question thus was that they believed that the following passage in the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel applied to the times of the Messiah: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your

filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (xxxvi. 25-27). John's answer meant that this was not his baptism, which was a baptism by water only, similar to that by which proselytes were admitted to the covenant with Israel, but that it referred to One among them whom they knew not, and who was as superior to him as a master is to his slave. The priests and Levites probably remained, anxious to discover who this great person was, and their anxiety was relieved the following day when John saw Jesus coming to him. St. Luke tells us that after the temptation in the wilderness, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (iv. 14), and He was no doubt on His way thither, having taken the route by the east bank of the Jordan. As soon as he saw Him, John said, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away," or, as you will find it on the margin, "which beareth the sin of the world." This was a very striking announcement,

that this Man who was approaching them was the Sin-bearer of the world, and those who heard it could hardly avoid feeling that it identified Him with the Person foretold in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, upon whom "the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all, who was oppressed and afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth, who was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth" (ver. 7, 8); and they must have been still more struck with astonishment when John added that this was the Person he referred to the previous day as being superior to himself, that it was to announce His coming that he was baptizing with water, and that he knew Him to be the Messiah, for a sign had been given him that "upon whom he should see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He who baptizeth with the Holy Spirit," as Ezekiel had prophesied. John then gave as his record to the priests and Levites that he had seen the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and that it abode upon Jesus, and that he had heard the voice from heaven declaring that "this was the Son of God," a record which must have still more startled them, and they probably

then returned to the Sanhedrim to report what they had seen and heard.

Then the next day, when John stood with two of his disciples, and looked upon Jesus as He walked, he pointed out Jesus to them again by repeating the announcement which the disciples had probably heard the previous day, "Behold the Lamb of God," and they followed Jesus to learn more from Himself. Jesus asks them what they wanted, and giving Him the complimentary title of Rabbi, they asked Him where He abode, that is, where He lodged for the night. By giving Him this title of Rabbi, or Master, which was borne by the Jewish teachers, they indicated their wish to become His disciples. Then He invited them to come with Him, and they remained with Him that day, it being then the tenth hour. Now from these circumstances it seems very plain that this must have been the Sabbath day. Jesus had probably remained there the previous night, and did not proceed on His journey home the next day, so as to avoid travelling on the Sabbath. In mentioning hours of the day the other Evangelists usually follow the Jewish mode of notation, by which they counted the twelve hours from six o'clock in the

evening and six o'clock in the morning; but St. John, who wrote his Gospel long after the fall of Jerusalem, and had lived many years in a Greek city, follows the Greek mode of notation, by which the hours were counted, as with us, from midnight and mid-day, so that this was ten o'clock in the forenoon, and the two disciples remained the rest of that day quietly with Him, being the Sabbath day. St. John gives us the name of one of the disciples—Andrew the brother of Simon Peter,—the other he does not name, as according to the usual custom of the Evangelists, he thus indicates that he himself was the other disciple. He therefore here narrates what he himself saw and did. He gives us no record of the conversation which took place during the day between Jesus and the two disciples, but we can hardly doubt that it related to the announcement John had made regarding Him. He would explain to them in what sense He was the Lamb of God. He would confirm to them the account John gave of His baptism—of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him in bodily shape, and of the voice from heaven, and, full of His recent conflict with Satan himself, who likewise appeared in a bodily shape to tempt Him, it is no extravagant

supposition that He then narrated to them the particulars of the temptation, and that through them it became known to the other disciples. Their immediate impulse was not only to join Him as His disciples, but to induce others to join Him. Andrew at once sought out his brother Simon, and communicated the great news that they had found the Messiah, and brought him to Jesus, who showed His intuitive knowledge by naming him as Simon the son of Jona, and telling him that He would add to his name that of Cephas, or Petros, the one being the Syriac and the other the Greek for a stone. The emphasis which St. John lays upon the circumstance that Andrew lost no time, but went the same day to seek his brother, and the silence which he observes about himself, leads us to conjecture that he likewise sought out his brother James and brought him to Jesus.

Then the following day Jesus proposes to resume His journey to Galilee, and finding Philip, calls him as a disciple, with the words, "Follow Me," which if he had been, as was probable, a disciple of John the Baptist, he would readily obey. Bethsaida, the city to which he, as well as Andrew and Peter, belonged, was situated on the northern shore

of the Sea of Galilee. Philip, however, was not as well instructed as the disciples who had remained with Jesus the previous day, and seems to have been well acquainted with the family of Jesus in Nazareth. Finding Nathanael, he did not say, as the others did, "We have found the Messiah," but "We have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write;" that is, he recognised Him as the Prophet foretold by Moses, and as the subject of Isaiah's prophecy, but still thought Him a mere man, by calling Him Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph; and this led to Nathanael saying, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" which may have been a common saying. If you will turn to the twenty-first chapter and second verse, you will see that Nathanael was a native of Cana of Galilee, a village in the mountains about six miles north of Nazareth, still known by the name of Kana-el-Jelil, and from which the hills about Nazareth can be seen. His meaning probably was, "Have we any reason to expect a prophet from out of Galilee?" As the chief priests and Pharisees afterwards said, "Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (vii. 52). Philip, however, persuaded him to come and see Jesus; and as Jesus had in every case recognised

the person who came to Him as soon as he saw Him, so here He recognised not only Nathanael, but his character, by which probably he was known among his neighbours as the "Israelite without guile." The expression is taken from the thirty-second Psalm: "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (ver. 2). Nathanael asks Him how He knew him, and Jesus shows further His intuitive knowledge by saying, "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." I must explain to you that it was a custom for the devout Jews, after the synagogue service on the Sabbath, to retire to a solitary grove, and under the shadow of a tree to engage in the reading of the law and in private prayer. Now the day before Philip called him was the Sabbath, and it is probable from what follows that Nathanael had been reading under a fig-tree that portion of the Book of Genesis where Jacob "dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (xxviii. 12); and he may have, like Jacob, been wrestling with God in prayer; but be this as it may, the reference to what he was then doing

secretly, and the implied secret presence of Jesus with him, brought instant conviction to his mind, and he answered, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." In this he was referring to the second Psalm, which may have been part of the synagogue service of the day: "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," and applying these terms to Jesus when he recognised Him as the Messiah. But Jesus answered him, "Because I show that I have a knowledge beyond what an ordinary man has, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than Jacob saw in his dream. Thou shalt see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The title of the Son of Man is applied in the Old Testament to the Messiah, and particularly in the Book of the Prophet Daniel, "Behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, . . . and there was given to Him dominion, and glory: . . . His dominion is an everlasting dominion" (vii. 13). Jesus here takes to Himself this title of the Son of Man in contrast to the title Nathanael gave Him, to show His essential human as well as

His Divine nature, and that in that character He would re-open to them the intercourse between God and man, of which there had been no indication during the last few centuries. There had, in fact, been no direct communication between God and His people since the last of the Old Testament prophets had ceased in the person of Malachi ; but this communication was now renewed in a higher sense by His sending His own Son in the flesh, and His disciples would be witnesses of that constant communion between the Son of Man on earth and His Divine Father in heaven, which was continued in spirit during the whole of His ministry on earth, and was visibly manifested when the heavens were opened at His baptism, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in a bodily shape ; again when angels ministered unto Him at His temptation, repeated at His agony in the garden, openly shown at His transfiguration, and typified after His crucifixion, when the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, and finally reached its climax when they saw Him ascend into the heavens, to sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Although Jesus had by His exhibition of super-human knowledge led to His recognition as the

Messiah by those brought to Him, and who, in consequence, became His disciples, He was yet further to confirm their faith by an exhibition of miraculous power. This was at Cana of Galilee, the home of Nathanael, where there was a marriage on the third day,—that is, the third day after the two days when His disciples came to Him. By the Jewish law marriages were only held on the fourth and the fifth days of the week,—if a maiden, on the fourth, and if a widow, on the fifth. Now if, as we supposed, the day when Andrew and John abode with Jesus was the Sabbath day, the next day, when Philip and Nathanael joined Him, would be the first day of the week, and the third day after that would be a Wednesday. St. John tells us that on the first day of the week Jesus “would go forth unto Galilee.” For this He had to cross the Jordan, and make His way through the southern plain of Galilee, past Nazareth, to the mountains where Cana was situated, a journey which, travelling on foot as they did, would well occupy the two intervening days; and St. John tells us that the mother of Jesus was there, and both Jesus and His disciples were called to the marriage, or rather, to the marriage feast, which usually lasted seven days. It is probable

that a rumour had reached them of the testimony given by John the Baptist to the priests and Levites regarding one who belonged to the neighbouring town of Nazareth, and the opportunity of Mary being present was taken to call for the presence likewise of Jesus and His disciples; but the addition of so many to the feast seems to have led to the supply of wine failing, and Mary calls Jesus' attention to it in a manner which indicates that He might miraculously increase the supply.

During His quiet life at Nazareth, when Jesus was absorbed in silent contemplation of the mission which He was aware was before Him, and in preparation for it, Mary must have been conscious of a latent power and force in her Son which separated Him in spirit from the rest of the family. She cannot have forgotten those incidents connected with His birth and childhood on which she had pondered in her heart. To her, too, the rumour of the testimony of John regarding Him must have come, and her mind may have reverted to the power shown by the prophet Elijah, when he was able to obtain for the widow of Zarephath that her barrel of meal should not waste, or her cruse of oil fail (1 Kings xvii. 14); but Jesus answered her, "Woman, what have I to do

with thee?" literally, "What to Me and to thee? Mine hour is not yet come." You must not suppose that in addressing His mother thus there was any discourtesy towards her. The word in Greek translated "woman" was the ordinary mode of addressing all females. The expression "Mine hour" occurs afterwards on five different occasions, viz. in chapter vii. verse 30; chapter viii. verse 20; chapter xii. verse 23; chapter xiii. verse 1; and chapter xvii. verse 1; and if you will refer to these passages you will see that it means that the time had not arrived when that particular event could properly take place. What He meant, therefore, was that the power of working miracles which He possessed as the Messiah was not to be exercised at the bidding of any person, even of His own mother, but must be reserved for those occasions when the purposes of His own high mission required it, which were not only to exhibit His miraculous power, but were always connected with the relief of the objects of them from some evil, and that the time had not come when He was to enter upon His public ministry. While making this intimation, He had, however, resolved to show His power for another purpose, and His mother seems to have anticipated

He would do so. The miracle which He worked on this occasion did not however consist, as is generally supposed, in His at once converting the whole water in these water-pots into wine. They contained two or three firkins a-piece, and were filled to the brim. Now a firkin consisted of as much water as was used for a Jewish bath,—that is, about eighteen or twenty gallons, so that each water-pot contained from forty to sixty gallons, and the whole six from two hundred and forty to three hundred and sixty gallons, and were used for the purifying of the Jews,—that is, for bathing. We can hardly suppose that He should, for the purpose of a marriage feast, have converted so large a quantity of water into wine. He directed the water-pots to be filled to the brim with water, to show that there could have been no wine in them; and you will see from the ninth verse that what the servants drew from the water-pots was water, and what they bore to the governor of the feast was wine, and this was the miracle. His object in showing His power on this occasion was to confirm the faith of His disciples, for St. John concludes his account of it by saying: “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.”

Lesson VIII.

THE LORD SUDDENLY COMETH TO HIS TEMPLE.

Read

ST. JOHN ii. 12—25 ; iii. 1—21.

ST. JOHN tells us that, after the marriage feast at Cana, Jesus went down to Capernaum with His mother and His brethren and His disciples, and remained there a short time. Joseph was probably by this time dead, so that the family had not the same tie to Nazareth ; but it was not on this occasion that Jesus made Capernaum His home. He came there probably because He would not go to Nazareth, which had been the home of His youth, till the time had come when He was openly to announce Himself as the Messiah, and His mother and brethren accompanied Him for the time. This is the first mention made of that place, and also of His brethren. Capernaum was a more important place than either Nazareth or Cana, and was situated on the north-western shore

of the Sea of Galilee. This sea is also called by St. John the Sea of Tiberias, because Herod Antipas had built a city on its south-western shore, which he named after the Emperor Tiberius. The hills, which are here close to the shore, recede from the lake north of Tiberias, leaving a plain, which was called the plain of Gennesareth, extending along the shore about three miles, and bounded on the north by the hills, which again approach the lake. Here there are the ruins of what was once a city, now called Khan Minieh, and on the shore, a mile farther north, is another group of ruined houses called Tel Hûm. One or other of them is the ancient Capernaum, most probably the former. At the north end of the lake, where the Jordan enters it, was Bethsaida, the city of Philip and Simon and Andrew, but it was probable on this occasion that the two latter made their abode in Capernaum, while Jesus, with Mary and His brethren, at this time made it their temporary residence only. These brethren of Jesus, as we learn from St. Matthew, were four in number, and their names were "James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas" (xiii. 56). You must not, however, suppose that because they are called the brethren of Jesus they must therefore have been the children of

Mary by her husband Joseph. This is the opinion of some, and they would thus be the younger brethren of Jesus through His mother; but others think that Mary had no other child but Jesus, and that they were either the sons of Joseph by a previous wife, or that they were the cousins of Jesus, and sons of Cleopas, by Mary, a sister of the mother of Jesus, who bore the same name, and that it was a custom among the Jews to call cousins brethren. It is, however, very doubtful whether there really existed such a custom among the Jews. You will probably think it unnecessary that I should place before you the grounds upon which these different opinions are based, and it will be enough to say that, as we proceed, you will find that the second opinion, viz., that they were the sons of Joseph by a previous wife, and therefore older than Jesus, is the one that accords best with what is told us about them in the Gospels.

How long Jesus remained at Capernaum is not told us, but the approach of the great annual feast of the Passover brought this to an end, and Jesus resolved to refuse to allow Himself any longer to be regarded as the reputed son of Joseph and Mary, to sever the tie which bound Him to the family life, and to

announce Himself publicly to the Jews as their promised Messiah and the Son of God, who was to give His life for the world at the approaching Passover feast. By His sudden appearance in the temple He was fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi: "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts" (iii. 1); and this gives us a date for the commencement of the public ministry of Jesus, for the Jewish Passover was held that year on the 10th of April. He was still further to fulfil the prophecy of Malachi: "And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (ver. 3), for "He found in the temple those that sold oxen, and sheep, and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, 'Take these things hence:

make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

The word "temple" is used by the Evangelists in two senses,—in the general sense, for the whole "mountain of the house," as the Jews called it, that is, the whole space of ground containing the buildings and courts of the temple, and separated as a sacred enclosure by a wall surrounding it; and in a more restricted sense for the sanctuary, consisting of the two holy compartments, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies, which represented the ancient tabernacle. Around it was first of all the Court of the Priests, where was the altar of burnt-offerings, then the Court of Israel, to which none but genuine Israelites were admitted, then the Court of the Women, and outside of all, the Outer Court of the Gentiles. Now the numbers who frequented Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover were very great, and came in crowds from all parts of the country to celebrate the feast. For them a very large provision required to be made of animals for the sacrifices, lambs for the Passover supper, bullocks for the festival after, doves for the offerings of those women and lepers cleansed who were not rich enough to provide a lamb. You will find those

offerings mentioned in the Book of Leviticus, and the permission to the poorer women and lepers to offer doves in place of a lamb, in the twelfth chapter, verse 8, and the fourteenth chapter, verse 21. Israelites had to pay half a shekel of Jewish money for the temple service, and as the coin of all Palestine was at this time Roman, it was necessary that there should be money-changers to change the Roman into Jewish money. This caused a market to be kept at the Passover-time at Jerusalem, so that those who came from a distance might not be forced to bring their Passover lamb, or bullock, or sacrifice lamb or bullock, along with them, but might purchase them at the temple when they came, and have their money changed; and this market gradually encroached within the temple enclosure, until it finally, with the connivance of the priests, occupied the Court of the Gentiles, and was held entirely within the temple. Jesus at once drove out the oxen and sheep, and overturned the tables of the money-changers, but was more gentle with those who provided doves for the poorer offerers, and merely desired them to take them away, saying, "Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

The suddenness of the action, and the consciousness that holding the market within the temple was an abuse, led to its being unopposed, and He would probably have the support of the more devout of the Jews, while it revealed to His disciples the expression which you will find in the sixty-ninth Psalm, "For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up" (ver. 9); but His calling the temple His Father's house must have revealed to their mind the announcement made by Jehovah to David, when He commanded him to build Him a house, which you will find in the seventh chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, "He shall build an house for My name; and I will stablish the throne of His kingdom for ever. I will be His Father, and He shall be My Son" (vers. 13, 14); and this, coupled with the report which the deputation from the Pharisees had given of the testimony of John, would lead them to question what the authority precisely was which He assumed to Himself when He thus acted, so they required Him to show them by a sign that He was the person spoken of in these prophecies; but the only sign which He gave them was, for reasons which will be afterwards explained, that if they put Him to death He would rise again the third day, and this He

stated in ambiguous terms : He said, " Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews understood Him to mean the buildings of the temple, and said, " Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt Thou rear it in three days ?" Now this reply of the Jews gives us another indication of the year in which Jesus came to the temple, for this temple was built by Herod in the eighteenth of his reign. This was the year 734 after the foundation of Rome. Forty-six years added to it brings us to the year 780, which corresponds with the year 27 of the Christian era.

Jesus, however, meant the temple of His body, which, if destroyed by His death, would be raised up in three days by His resurrection ; and by so naming it, He indicated His true nature as the Son of God in human form, for His body could be quite appropriately termed the temple of God, as His Divine nature was enshrined in it. This saying, dark at the time, became clear to His disciples after the resurrection had taken place. The Passover was followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, also called the Feast of the Passover, which lasted for seven days, and Jesus appears to have remained during that time, and, St. John implies, performed

many miracles. You will naturally wish to know what the character of these miracles was, and why, after He had answered the demand of the Jews for a sign by an obscure allusion to His resurrection, He should now work miracles, or, as St. John really terms them, signs.

The reason seems to be this: Jesus announced Himself to the Jews in two characters. He was their long-promised and long-expected Messiah, and He was also the Son of God, who came into the world to redeem it by His dying for its sins. Now, although the prophecies of the Messiah in the Old Testament, when rightly understood, implied that He would be the Son of God, and would suffer death for sinners, the Jews had ceased to associate such ideas with their Messiah, and believed that He would be a Man endowed with miraculous powers, who would restore the kingdom of Israel to its former glory, and reign in righteousness. In order then to substantiate His character as their Messiah, He exhibited those miracles which it was prophesied would accompany the Messiah. You will find what these are by turning to the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, in the thirty-fifth chapter: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the

deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (ver. 5, 6); and again, in the forty-second chapter: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners,"—that is, of Satan,—“from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house" (ver. 6, 7). We are not told what miracles Jesus did at the feast, but, as they led to Jews believing on Him, they must have been of this character; yet while such miracles would give weight to His claim to be the Messiah, they would be of no avail in proving to the Jews His higher character as the Son of God, for the Jews believed that God could give man the power of working them, and knew that such miracles had been worked by their old prophets, who were men such as Elijah, who even raised one from the dead. Jesus then invariably referred to His future resurrection from the dead as the great proof of His Divine character, and that this is so you will see if you turn to the eleventh chapter of St.

Matthew, where he tells us that John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Art thou He that should come?" that is, Art thou the Messiah? and Jesus answers, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (ver. 4, 5); that is, I do those miracles which it was foretold the Messiah would perform; but you will see St. Paul founds solely upon the resurrection the proof of His being the Son of God, when he says of the Gospel of God that it was "concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. i. 3, 4). It is as well that this should be explained to you now, as you will find it a clue to much told us in the Gospel history regarding the miracles of Jesus, and the frequent demand of the Jews that He should give a sign, notwithstanding these miracles. On the present occasion they seem to have led to the Jews believing He might be the Messiah, but He did not trust

them on that account, and well He was justified in refusing to believe in their sincerity, for if you will turn to the fourteenth chapter of St. Mark, and the fifty-eighth verse, you will see that when the chief priests and all the council sought for witnesses against Jesus to put Him to death, these very Jews came forward to bear false witness against Him, saying: "We heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands,"—an obvious perversion of what they really heard Him say.

But besides the announcement of His mission in what He did and said in the temple, Jesus was to have an opportunity of preaching the Gospel to one of the chief men among the Jews. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews,—that is, a member of the great council, or Sanhedrim. He had, therefore, heard the report which the deputation sent by the Pharisees to question John had brought back. He had no doubt seen the cleansing of the temple court by Jesus, and probably approved it, and he had witnessed the miracles that He had been working. He was therefore, as a sincere and learned Jew, anxious to know more about His mission, without attracting observation, and came to Jesus by night. He

addressed Him by the title of Rabbi, or Teacher, admitting the impression which His appearance and actions had made upon him ; but he went no further than to say that He must be a teacher sent from God, as no one could do these miracles unless God were with him. He thus expressed his willingness to learn the truth from Him, and Jesus met his desire fully. You will see that the discourse which follows falls naturally into two parts,—first, that contained in verses 3 to 11, which Jesus terms “earthly things,” and that contained in verses 13 to 20, which He calls “heavenly things.” Now the first part relates entirely to the doctrine of regeneration, and the second part to the doctrine of the atonement and justification by faith, to use modern language ; and thus, at the very outset of His public ministry, He unfolds to this cultivated and earnest inquirer what is really the whole Gospel. He strikes at once at the root of the Jewish prejudices when He says, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The idea of any internal change of the heart and mind by which a man became spiritually a new creature was quite alien to the mind of the Jews. They founded their religion upon their privileges as true Israelites, and children

of Abraham, and upon the rigid observance of outward ordinances; and the announcement was so strange to Nicodemus that, at the moment, he took it in a literal sense, and said, How can an old man be born again? Then, with His emphatic "Verily, verily," which precede all His solemn utterances of vital truths, Jesus explained His meaning, that this new or second birth was a birth of water and the Spirit,—that what is naturally born is merely the fleshly creature, but what is born of the Spirit is a spiritual birth. Nicodemus knew of the baptism of proselytes and slaves, and knew also that it was termed by the Jews regeneration, but merely in the sense of a change of circumstance or relation. Thus the Jews had a maxim: "A Gentile that is proselyted, and a servant that is set free, behold, he is as a child new born; for all the kindred which he had, whilst he was a heathen and a servant, he now must know no more for his kindred;" and St. Paul probably alludes to this maxim when he applies it in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians to a heathen becoming Christian: "Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore

if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new " (v. 16, 17).

Jesus then tells Nicodemus he must not only be born again of water, that is, by baptism, but also of the Spirit, and He compares the operation of the Holy Spirit to that of wind. The direction of the wind is not caused by any human agency. We see it not ; we know not why it comes and goes in a particular direction ; but we judge of that by the sound of it, by witnessing its effects upon the trees, or the clouds, or the waves of the sea. So it is with one born of the Spirit. We see no outward action ; we know not why it comes at one time or another ; but we can see that a human being has been born again of the Spirit, by its effects, by the change it has produced in the current of his ideas, in his principles of action, and in the entire change of his conduct, which is now no longer under the influence of worldly motives, but governed by the new spiritual life.

These ideas are too new and contrary to his previous conceptions to be accepted at once by Nicodemus, and he exclaims, "How can these things be?" but Jesus responds that, as a master

and teacher in Israel, if he had rightly understood what God has already declared in the inspired records of the law and the prophets, he ought to have known that this was no new doctrine. He might have learnt that from the Prophecies of Ezekiel: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh" (xi. 19); and again: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (xxxvi. 25, 26). Also from the Prophecies of Joel, which, if you will turn to the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, you will see St. Peter says was fulfilled in the outpouring of the Spirit. But Nicodemus could neither see it himself, nor receive it on the assurance of one whom he recognised as a teacher sent from God. The use of the plural in the expression here, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness," seems to imply that some of the disciples were

present, and probably St. John, who records the conversation.

Jesus now proceeds to unfold to him that higher doctrine which he terms "heavenly things," and tells him that if he could not receive those elementary spiritual truths, those familiar and visible things of the kingdom of heaven, on His testimony, how could he expect to believe Him when He spoke of those higher heavenly truths which could be based upon no earthly testimony, for no man had ascended up to heaven to learn it there? It rested upon far higher testimony, even upon that of One who had come down from heaven, and that person was the Son of Man, who in one sense came down from heaven, but, as being called the Son of God, may be regarded as still in heaven. Nicodemus must have been aware that the title of the Son of Man was applied by Daniel to the Messiah. And this great heavenly truth was that He was also the Son of God, came down from heaven, and took our nature upon Him, in order that He might suffer death for the sins of the whole world. This truth Jesus illustrates by reminding Nicodemus of the incident in the history of the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness when they were bitten by the

fiery serpents, and when, on their repentance, Moses made a brazen serpent, which he lifted up, and all who looked upon it were healed. You will find the account of this in the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Numbers, verse 8; and this was typical of the Son of Man, who must likewise be lifted up, and all who believe on Him should not perish, but have eternal life; and then He further explains that the world is under condemnation, but that God out of His great love has given His only-begotten Son, that those who believe on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life, but those who believe not remain under their condemnation; that He is come into the world as a great light, but the condemnation of those who receive it not is wilful, as they deliberately refuse to part from the evil of the world, and hate the light because it would reprove them; but all who love the truth come to the light, and do not fear it, because their deeds are wrought in God.

By the expression that the Son of Man must be lifted up, is meant that He would die on the cross, as you will see if you turn to the twelfth chapter and thirty-second verse, where Jesus says: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all

men unto Me. (This He said, signifying what death He should die.)” Jesus thus knew, and announced at the very outset of His mission, that its great and leading feature was that, “being found in fashion as a man, He was to humble Himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” and He kept this steadily before Him as the end of His mission, throughout the whole of His ministry on earth. Thus the great truth of the Gospel, the necessity of a new birth, the love of God to the world, the coming of the Son of God in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, the redemption of the world by His death upon the cross, and the atonement then made, and the free salvation of all who receive these great truths and believe in that atonement, was fully proclaimed at the very outset of His ministry.

Nicodemus appears to have received this announcement in profound silence. Had he understood the prophecies regarding the Messiah in their true sense, he would have known that He was to be the Son of God as well as the Son of Man, and was to come in great humility as a suffering Saviour, even to death, for the sins of the world, as well as to come in glory and receive an everlasting kingdom; but

the Jewish mind had failed to grasp the true significance of these prophecies, and the Jews shut their eyes and their hearts to everything that was inconsistent with the idea of His being a temporal king who was to restore the Jewish nation, and to reign over them in glory. That the impression made on Nicodemus was very great you will find afterwards.

Lesson XX.

THE END OF THE MISSION OF JOHN.

Read

ST. JOHN iii. 22—36; iv. 1-45.

WHEN the Feast of the Passover and of Unleavened Bread had terminated, and the multitude who had assembled first were dispersing to their own homes, Jesus and the disciples who were with Him likewise left, and went into the country of Judea, which lay between Jerusalem and Samaria. He no doubt continued His teaching both among the numbers going in that direction from Jerusalem and the people of the country; and when many joined as disciples, He stayed His journey, and had them baptized, not by Himself, for His baptism was that of the Holy Ghost, but by His disciples, so that this baptism was analogous to that of John—a baptism of water to confirm them as His disciples. This was not in the Jordan, otherwise it would have been mentioned, but it may have been in that Pool of

Gideon, mentioned in the second chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, and the thirteenth verse. Gideon was in the mountains of Judea, not far from the direct route to Galilee through Samaria.

John, too, had crossed the Jordan and gone into the interior of the country west of that river, where he also was baptizing. St. John says it was in *Ænon*, near to *Salim*. This part of Galilee consisted of the great plain of *Esdraelon*, extending from the river *Jordan* to the *Mediterranean*. It was bounded on the north by the mountains of Galilee, and the most conspicuous figure in it was the isolated mountain in the northern part of it, called *Mount Tabor*. This plain was the portion of *Issachar*, one of the twelve tribes of *Israel*. Now, if you will turn to the nineteenth chapter of the *Book of Joshua*, you will find in the seventeenth and following verses the names of the sixteen cities, with their villages, which belonged to that tribe, and in verse 22 you will see it said: "And the coast reacheth to *Tabor*, and *Shahazimah*, and *Beth-shemesh*;" but in the *Septuagint*, which was a Greek translation of the *Old Testament* made before the time of our Saviour, and from which the apostles frequently quoted, the passage is thus given: "And the boundaries shall

border upon Gaethbor, and upon Salim westward, and Baethsamys." Salim was therefore, at the time that translation was made, the name of the city called in the Book of Joshua "Shahazimah," and it lay south-westward from Mount Tabor; and Ainon was probably situated on the upper waters of the river Kishon, which rises in the centre of the plain, and flows into the Mediterranean. The name is derived from the Hebrew *Ain*, a fountain, and signifies a place of fountains.

We have thus Jesus teaching in the country of Judea, which lay between Jerusalem and Samaria, and His disciples baptizing those who joined Him as such; and we have John preparing His way in the southern part of Galilee, which lay immediately north of Samaria; and this brings us to the last great utterance which he made in the spirit of prophecy regarding Jesus as the coming Messiah who was to supersede him. This was called forth, St. John tells us, by a question which then arose between John's disciples and the Jews regarding purifying. The purifications among the Jews were of two kinds. These were, first, the various purifyings, washings, and sprinklings appointed in the written law; and, secondly, the Pharisaical washings brought in by

tradition, and sanctioned by the oral or unwritten law. The disciples of John appear to have opposed to these the baptism of John as superior to the ceremonial baptisms of the Jews, and the latter, who were probably Jews of Galilee, who had returned from the Feast of the Passover, and had witnessed the disciples of Jesus baptizing in the country of Judea, retorted by saying, Though you hold up your baptism as superior to ours, there is another baptism superior to yours; for He to whom John bare such emphatic witness in Bethania, beyond Jordan, is baptizing through His disciples, and the people are now flocking to Him. John, however, explains this by saying, that what they did depended on their mission from Heaven, and that they had heard him declare that he was not the Messiah, but His forerunner. He illustrates this by comparing Jesus to a bridegroom, and himself to the friend of the bridegroom, or the groomsman, as we would call him, who rejoices with the bridegroom, though the latter only possesses the bride, so he says his own joy at witnessing the promised Messiah and hearing of His teaching is a perfect joy, and then follows a great prophetic utterance in which he contrasts his position and function with that of Jesus. You will

observe the contrast throughout what follows. He must increase, and John must decrease ; that is, He must present Himself to the Jews as the Messiah, while the mission of John as His forerunner must cease. Jesus "cometh from above, and is above all," but John is "of the earth, and is earthly." John "speaketh of the earth," but Jesus "that cometh from heaven is above all ; and what he hath seen and heard that he testifieth." John thus explains to his disciples why Jesus was followed by greater numbers than he had been. He was so much followed because it was "given Him from heaven," while John must decrease, because "a man can receive nothing unless it is given him from heaven." He then applies this truth to the Jews who disputed with them, by telling them that they would not receive his testimony, but that whoever receives the testimony of Jesus "sets to his seal that God is true," because God hath sent Him, and given Him the Spirit without measure, and therefore He speaks the words of God. John concludes by a solemn declaration of what is in truth the very essence of the Gospel, in words very similar to what Jesus Himself had used to Nicodemus. He declares the love of God to Jesus as His Son ; "that He has given all things

into His hand ; that whosoever believeth on Him as the Son of God hath everlasting life, and whosoever believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." If you will refer back to verse 16, and two following verses, you will see how close the parallel is. The love of God to His Son, and to the world by giving Him for their redemption ; the salvation of the world through faith in Him ; the world remaining under condemnation, and the wrath of God abiding on it, if, by rejecting Him, they do not accept that salvation so as to be delivered from it ;—this was the Gospel which Jesus, as the Son of God, was to proclaim to the world.

When John said that he must decrease, he probably knew that the end of his mission was at hand ; and we learn from the other Evangelists that Galilee, where John was at this time baptizing, was under the rule of Herod Antipas, as tetrarch. St. Mark tells that he feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and observed him, or, as you will find it on the margin, " kept him," in the right way, and heard him gladly ; but he had at this time committed a great sin, and John felt it his duty to reprove him faithfully for it. This sin was that he had shortly before gone to Rome, where his brother

Philip was, and lived with him. Philip was married to his own niece, Herodias, the daughter of his brother Aristobulus; while Herod was married to a daughter of the king of Arabia, whom he had left behind him. When he left Rome Herodias fled with him, and he now proposed to divorce his wife and to marry Herodias. Even if Philip had been dead, and he himself had no wife, he could not by the Jewish law have married Herodias, because Philip had a daughter by her, called Salome; but Philip being alive, the crime, according to the Jewish law, as well as against the law of God, was greater, and John told him plainly that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. St. Mark tells us (vi. 19) that Herodias had in consequence a quarrel or inward grudge against him, and incited Herod to kill him; but this he would not do, and, in order to satisfy her, he had him arrested, and sent to the citadel he had in the south of Peræa, called Machærus, where he imprisoned him, but left him at liberty, as we shall afterwards see, to receive his disciples there. This took place after Jesus had been teaching in Judea for a considerable time, as St. John tells us that He tarried there.

Though St. John gives us no further particulars of

His sojourn there than that "all men came to Him," we shall see from what follows that it must have lasted several months; St. Matthew tells us (iv. 12) that when Jesus heard that John had been imprisoned, He departed, or withdrew, into Galilee, so as to occupy the field from which John had been taken, knowing that his mission as His forerunner was now accomplished. There were two routes from Judea to Galilee—one through Samaria, and the other by crossing the Jordan above the Dead Sea, proceeding along its eastern bank, and recrossing it into Galilee. The former is the shorter and more direct route, but the latter, though longer and more circuitous, was usually adopted by the Jews, owing to the hostile feeling which existed between them and the Samaritans. On the present occasion St. John tells us that Jesus must needs go through Samaria, implying that He was impelled by some strong feeling. That feeling probably was that, with His superhuman knowledge, He knew there was a woman there who was longing for the coming of the Messiah, and whose darkened mind might receive the light, and so give Him a door of access to the Samaritans.

The journey from Jerusalem to Galilee through Samaria was considered to be a three days' journey,

but Jesus was already near the southern boundary of Samaria, and so far on the way ; His first day's journey would therefore bring Him to a town in the middle of Samaria called Sychar, which, St. John adds, was "near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there." Sychar is the same place which is called in the Old Testament Shalem, a town then of the Amorites, and afterwards Shechem ; and if you will turn to the thirty-third chapter of Genesis, verse 18, you will find it said that "Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-aram, and pitched his tent before the city. And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father." Then in chapter xlvi. verse 22, when Jacob, then called Israel, blesses his son Joseph, he adds, "Moreover, I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite." In the following chapter, verse 22, the well is mentioned : "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well." And, finally, in the Book of Joshua, chapter xxiv. verse 32, you will read, "And the bones of Joseph, which

the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for an hundred pieces of silver : and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph." The town is situated in a valley between two hills called Gerizim and Ebal, and is now called Nablous. The well is still to be seen, and is about half a mile distant from it.

Jesus appears, as was not unusual at the time, to have journeyed through the night, and reached the well about six o'clock in the morning, for St. John uses the Greek notation of the hours, and not the Jewish. Being wearied with His journey, Jesus sat down on the parapet of the well while the disciples who were with Him went into the city to buy food. The woman of Samaria then comes from the city to the well to draw water, and is surprised to find, as she thought, a Jew sitting there, and still more when He asked her for a draught of water, for, as St. John explains, the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. The causes of this mutual hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans you will find in the history of the country. Samaria formed part of the kingdom of David and of his son Solomon.

But on the death of the latter, ten of the tribes of the Israelites revolted against his son Rehoboam under Jeroboam, and formed the kingdom of Israel, while the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who remained faithful to him, and in whose territories Jerusalem was situated, became the kingdom of Judah. Judah thus possessed the temple which Solomon had built, and to which every male of the children of Israel was bound to go at the three great festivals, so, in order to prevent this kingdom of Israel from re-uniting with that of Judah, Jeroboam set up strange altars and an idolatrous worship. The kingdom of Israel came to an end when it was conquered by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, who carried away the main part of the population, and left in their stead people from his own country, as you will read in the seventeenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, which he placed in the cities of Samaria, but sent one of the priests he had carried away to teach them the worship of the God of Israel, while many of the foreign nations introduced retained the worship of their own gods. There was thus in Samaria a mixed population, partly of Jews and partly of strangers, and among them a corrupted form of the Jewish religion.

separated from the temple worship at Jerusalem, and which still subsisted when the latter failed during the captivity of the people of Judah by the king of Babylon. When the Jews returned from their captivity, and proceeded to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, the Samaritans gave them all the opposition they could, as you will see in the fourth chapter of the Book of Ezra, and, according to the traditions of the Jews, they were then formally excommunicated and cursed, and separated from the people of God. We learn, however, from the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Nehemiah and the twenty-eighth verse, that one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, married the daughter of Sanballat, a chief man among the Samaritans, and was in consequence driven out of Judea; and Josephus, the Jewish historian, who calls him Manasses, tells us that Sanballat built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, close to Shechem, and constituted him high priest of it. The Samaritans thus set up a rival temple worship, and Josephus adds that it caused an apostasy at Jerusalem, for many who were accused of violating the minute observances of the oral law fled to Shechem and to Mount Gerizim, which became a common

sanctuary for such offenders ; as the Samaritans, like the Sadducees, acknowledged the written books of the law only. There was thus a feeling of bitter hostility engendered between the two nations. The Jews regarded the Samaritans as apostates from the temple worship, and as setting up temple against temple, high priest against high priest, and worship against worship, and the Samaritans resented the intolerance and dogmatism of the Jews, and refused submission to the oral and unwritten glosses they had put upon the laws of Moses. The temple thus erected was destroyed in the second century before Christ, but the Samaritans still regarded the Mount as a holy place, and celebrated the great Jewish festivals there.

This explanation has been necessary to enable you better to understand the conversation between Jesus and the woman of Samaria. Jesus then answers the woman, when she expressed surprise that a Jew should ask her, a Samaritan, to give Him to drink, that if she knew the gift of God, and who it was who spoke to her, instead of His asking her to give Him to drink, she would have asked of Him and He would have given her living water. By the gift of God, Jesus means Himself, as the Son of

God given for the redemption of the world, and that He was the Messiah, and by the living water He meant the Holy Spirit, as you will see if you turn to the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth verses of the seventh chapter; but the expression "living water" means literally running water, or spring water; and this woman, just as Nicodemus did in the conversation with Him, took it at first in the literal sense, and asked Him how He was to draw it, as the well was deep—it is in fact between seventy and eighty feet deep—and whether He was a greater person than Jacob, who gave them the well, by offering to give her a better water. But Jesus presented the subject in a more striking light, just as He had done with Nicodemus, and said that any one drinking of the water of Jacob's well would thirst again, but any one drinking of this water would never thirst, for the well would be in himself, springing up into everlasting life. The woman, still unable to grasp the spiritual meaning, said, "Give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor to have to draw water from this deep well." Jesus then, to impress upon her the authority with which He spoke, proceeded, as He had done when the disciples joined Him, to show that He possessed knowledge beyond

that of any ordinary man, for, by telling her to call her husband, He was able to let her see that He knew intuitively her previous history and present mode of life, which drew forth from her at once the acknowledgment that He must be a prophet; but this only increased her surprise that a Jewish prophet should instruct a Samaritan woman, and she indicated this by remarking that the Samaritans worshipped in the mountain of Gerizim, where they had their own temple and priesthood, while the Jews held that the only true temple-worship was in Jerusalem. Jesus so far vindicates the Jews by saying that they correctly knew what their true worship should be, and the Samaritans were in error; but she must have been still more astonished when He prophesied, as she now thought Him a prophet, that this worship, confined to places and temples, was about to pass away, and a more spiritual worship would supersede it, when the true worshippers would worship God in spirit and in truth, and that would be the only acceptable worship; and then He sums it up in one of the grandest utterances that ever fell from His lips, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

This was to be the worship of God in the kingdom of heaven which He came to proclaim, and in the Christian Church which He was to purchase with His own blood. It was to be spiritual worship, and it was to be true worship. Spiritual worship is opposed to carnal or purely ceremonial worship, as that of the Jews had become, and true worship was opposed to false worship, like that of the heathen. As God is a Spirit, it is with the spiritual part of our nature that we can only worship Him acceptably, and not merely by outward forms and ceremonies and postures of the body, and this was repeatedly and anxiously announced to the Jews by the Old Testament prophets, as in Hosea, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings" (vi. 6), and is plainly stated in the fifty-first Psalm, "For Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (ver. 16, 17). But we must also worship under a sense of the true relation between God and ourselves. We must not only worship spiritually, but we must believe rightly what God is to us, what we are in His sight, and

what He requires of us—that God is “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty” (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7); that we are sinners in His sight, and under the condemnation of the world; and that He requires of us to believe in His Son Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, to accept the salvation offered to us through Him as our Saviour and Redeemer, and to obey His commandments.

The woman appears to have understood that He referred to the time of the Messiah as that in which this spiritual worship would supersede the local ceremonial worship of the Jews and Samaritans, and therefore said that she knew the Messiah would come, and when He came He would teach them everything they should know; and then Jesus made to her the emphatic announcement, “I that speak unto thee am He.” At this moment the disciples, who had gone into the city, returned, and were surprised to find Him talking with a Samaritan woman, but did not venture either to ask the woman what she wanted, or Jesus why He spoke to her; but the woman, in her haste to tell her neighbours the

wonderful event, left her water-pot, and hastened to the city to inform them that Jesus had told her of her whole life, and that she thought He was the Messiah. In the meantime, the disciples pressed Him to eat, but Jesus, full of the work He had commenced in Samaria, said that He had other meat to eat, for His meat was to do the will of His Father, and to carry on the work He gave Him to do. He gives them, as He often did, an illustration from the scene before Him. "You would say, looking at the fields, that there are yet four months till the harvest, but, if you think of the spiritual harvest, it is now ready, and that is a harvest in which you will gather fruit unto life eternal; you will receive wages, and those wages will be the joy with which both he who soweth the seed and he who reaps the grain will rejoice together. You will reap that whereon you have bestowed no labour, for I have sown the seed;" and this was verified when many of the Samaritans believed on Him from what the woman told them. The expression, that "there are yet four months to the harvest" gives us an indication of the period of the year when this event took place. The harvest commenced with the barley harvest, which was reaped at the Passover,

and it fell that year on the 29th of March, so that four months previously would give us the end of November; and Jesus thus remained six months in Judea before He entered Samaria. Those who came to Him from the city then asked Him to remain with them, and He did so for two days. The result of what they heard from Him during that time was that many more believed that He was indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

When the two days came to an end, Jesus crossed the northern frontier of Samaria and entered Galilee, where He was well received by those who had been at Jerusalem during the Passover and seen His miracles there. The meaning of the proverb which Jesus quotes, that a prophet has no honour in his own country, is that they received Him well, not on account of the character He bore in Galilee, which was His own country, but of the report they brought regarding Him from Jerusalem.

Jesus had now severed Himself entirely from His own family, so He did not go to His mother's house in Nazareth, but went to Cana of Galilee, where He was known from the miracle He did there at the marriage-feast, and where one of His disciples, Nathanael, had his home, with whom He no doubt dwelt.

Lesson X.

JESUS TEACHES IN THE SYNAGOGUES.

Read

ST. JOHN iv. 46—54.; ST. LUKE iv. 15—30;

ST. MATTHEW iv. 13—22.

AS soon as it became known that Jesus was in Galilee, a nobleman, or rather a courtier of Herod, whose son was sick at Capernaum, came to Jesus, and besought Him to go down to Capernaum and heal his son. He had no doubt been at Jerusalem at the Feast, and witnessed some of the miracles by which Jesus had healed the sick, and therefore Jesus said to him, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe;" and when he still pressed Him to come, because his son was on the point of death, Jesus resolved to try if his faith in Him was real by saying, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." And the nobleman believed His word, and went home. When the servants whom he

met on the way told him that the fever had left him yesterday, at the seventh hour, you must not suppose, from the expression "yesterday," that the nobleman took two days to go from Cana to Capernaum, for the distance was not great. You must always keep in mind, in reading the Gospels, that the Jewish day did not begin, like ours, at midnight, but at sunset, which was reckoned thus to be at six o'clock in the evening, and they counted the twelve hours from six o'clock to six o'clock. The seventh hour was therefore one o'clock in the afternoon, and if it was after six o'clock in the evening when the servants met their master, they would call the day before that hour yesterday. The nobleman, however, knew that it was exactly one o'clock when Jesus said "Thy son liveth;" and he believed and his whole house. St. John adds that "this was the second miracle Jesus did in Galilee;" and this miracle was well calculated at once to convert the half-believing nobleman and his whole house, for there could be no mistake as to the exhibition of Divine power manifested in healing disease at a distance by the mere expression of His will, without personal intervention. St. Luke tells us that there went out a fame of

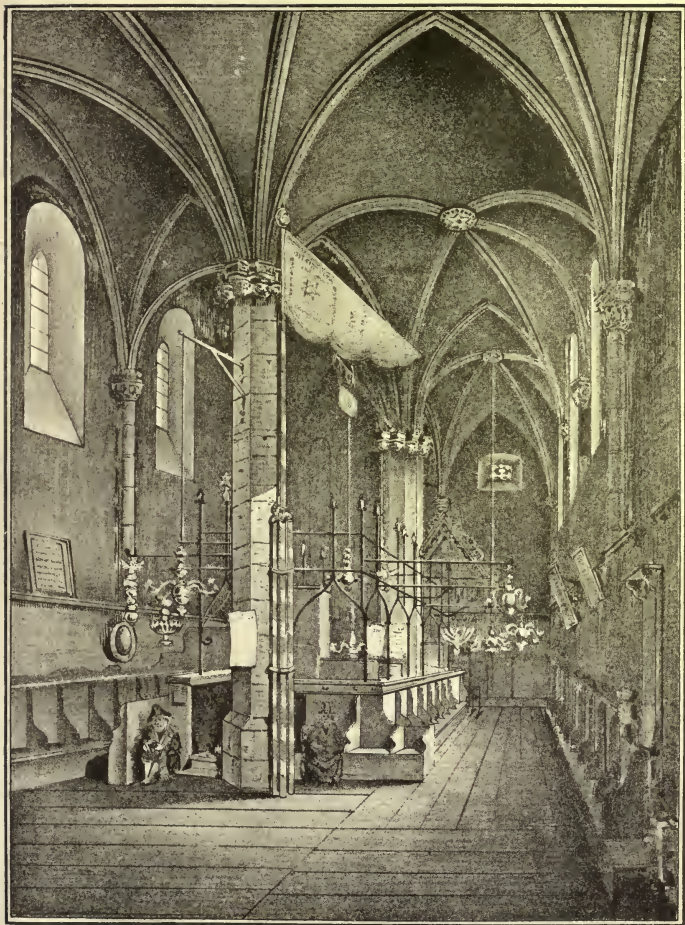
Him through all the regions round about, and He taught in their synagogues, "being glorified of all." It will be as well that I should now tell you what these Jewish synagogues were, and how He came to be allowed to teach in them.

The name "synagogue" comes from a Greek word signifying simply an assembly; but, like our word "church," it came to have a double meaning. It signified first an assembly of persons for the worship of God, and it was applied, secondly, to the place or building within which they worshipped. Although it is plain from the narratives in the New Testament that there were synagogues in every town or city, and even the larger villages throughout not only Judea, but Samaria and Galilee, and the synagogue service prevailed everywhere, you must not suppose that it was in any way connected with or formed part of the temple worship. Its origin was in fact much more recent. Before Jerusalem was taken by the king of Babylon, and the Jews carried away captive by him, we find no trace of synagogues in the Old Testament. The only stated worship among the Jews was that first of the tabernacle and afterwards of the temple. It consisted of the regular morning and evening sacri-

fices, of the special sacrifices and offerings prescribed in the law, and of the great festivals, to three of which, viz. Passover, Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles, every male Jew was bound to come; and the functions of the priests and Levites were entirely confined to the temple worship. But during the Captivity in Babylon, when the temple worship had ceased, it became customary for the more devout of the Jews to pray privately in an upper room, having a window looking towards Jerusalem, which they opened during prayer. You will find an instance of this in the Book of Daniel. We read, in the sixth chapter and tenth verse, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and, his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." After the Jews returned from the Captivity, and Jerusalem was rebuilt, and the temple worship again established, it became necessary to promulgate anew the laws of Moses, and to make the people generally acquainted with them. In order to effect this the people were assembled everywhere on the Sabbath to hear the

law read to them and expounded, and thus synagogues became established all over the land. You will find what was probably the first institution of them in the Book of Nehemiah, chapter viii., when the people were gathered together to hear the law of Moses, which was read before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, from a pulpit of wood, by Ezra and other doctors, from morning till mid-day, having first "blessed the Lord, the great God: and all the people answered, Amen" (ver. 6). "So they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (ver. 8). Here the word "congregation" is equivalent to synagogue; and in these verses we have the outline of the synagogue service, viz. praise and thanksgiving, the people answering "Amen," the Book of the Law read from a pulpit of wood, followed by the explanation. The synagogues were soon multiplied through the land; and it became an established rule that a synagogue was erected in every town or village where there were ten men of leisure, of full age and free condition, who could undertake to attend all the synagogue services, and take part in them. One result of

the establishment of the synagogue worship, which brought the teaching of the law home to every town and village in the land, was that while under the temple worship at Jerusalem the Jews were constantly relapsing into idolatry, which led at last to the Captivity, after their return to their own land they adhered steadfastly to the worship of the one true God. In the time of our Saviour the synagogue was usually an oblong building, with a recess at the west end. In this was placed the chest or ark containing the Books of the Law, and it was separated from the rest of the building by curtains. In front of the recess was a square platform, capable of containing several persons, and on the platform a pulpit or desk, from which the law was read. In the body of the synagogue were seats for the men, those next the ark being reserved for the rabbis or elders, and the women sat in an enclosed gallery above. Probably the oldest synagogue in Europe is one called in German "Altneuschule," in Prague, which I have visited, and it exactly corresponds with this description. The priests and Levites took no part as such in the government and service of the synagogue; but its officers consisted, in a full synagogue, of seven persons,



OLD SYNAGOGUE IN PRAGUE

called "the seven good men of the city." Of these one was president, or chief ruler, three were rulers, and three were called *Parnasim*, who took charge of the secular affairs of the synagogue; two of them collecting the alms of the people, and the third distributing them. These seven men were ordained by imposition of hands. These were the elders, and had the title of Rabbi, or Doctor. The president was officially also the *Scheliach tsibbur*, or Angel of the Church, whose duty it was to offer up the prayers of the people; but he might devolve this duty on any one of the seven. Under them was the *Chazzan*, or minister.

In small villages, where the full staff of seven elders could not be obtained, they were sometimes reduced to three, and sometimes there was only one ruler, or Rabbi. The service in the synagogue was held on three days in the week, viz. the Sabbath, the second day, or Monday, and the fifth day, or Thursday. It consisted of three parts: first, prayer and praise; second, the reading of the law; and third, the reading of a portion of one of the books of the Prophets, followed by an explanation or sermon.

The public service was read, or rather intoned,

by the *Scheliach tsibbur*. It commenced with a prayer, called the *Kaddisch*; and I shall have to tell you something about this prayer afterwards. It was followed by the *Schemah*, or confession of faith, which consisted of three portions selected from the Law. These were six verses (from four to ten) of the ninth chapter, and nine verses (from thirteen to twenty-one) of the eleventh chapter, of the Book of Deuteronomy, with five verses (from thirty-seven to forty-one) of the Book of Numbers. This was followed by the *Schemon Esre*, which consisted of nineteen prayers, eighteen of which were believed to have been composed by Ezra and his colleagues. Each prayer was repeated, first in silence by each member of the congregation, and then aloud by the *Scheliach tsibbur*, the people answering "Amen" after each; and the *Schemon Esre* was preceded by the versicles, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise;" and followed by, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." The *Kaddisch* was again repeated, and then followed the reading of the Law. The five books of Moses were read through once every year, beginning with

the Sabbath following the Feast of Tabernacles, and were divided into fifty-four sections. One section was read each Sabbath, and was divided amongst seven readers, who were called out from the congregation for the purpose. After this followed the 145th Psalm, and then a different person, and usually one of higher attainments, was called out to read from *The Prophets*, which comprehended not only the prophetic books, but also the books of Joshua and Judges, the two Books of Samuel, and the two Books of Kings. He was called in Hebrew the *Maphtir*, and usually the same person was always selected by the ruler of the synagogue to fulfil this duty. One of the books was handed to the reader, and he might select such verses, not exceeding twenty-one in number, as he thought proper; and after this the *Daraschoth*, or discourse, and the service closed by the *Kaddisch* being again repeated.

I have thought it would interest you to have the Hebrew names of each part of the service, the account of which is taken from the Jewish writings; and this explanation will enable you better to understand the very striking scene which St. Luke now puts before us. He tells us of Jesus coming

to His native town, Nazareth, and what befell Him there. When St. Luke adds the expression, "where He was brought up," we may infer that as a boy He had been taught in the synagogue school till He reached the age of twelve, and had impressed the Rabbi who taught Him, as He afterwards did the Doctors in the temple, with the unusual wisdom and intelligence He displayed. When He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, He must have been at once recognised, and the report of His miracles and His teaching in the other synagogues must have led to a general expectation when He stood up to read the lesson from the Prophets. St. Luke's expression, "as his custom was," shows us, not only that it was at this part of the service He taught in the synagogues, but also gives us an indication of the character of His teaching, viz., to bring before them the true sense of those prophecies regarding the future Messiah, which they so grievously misunderstood, and to show their fulfilment in His own person. And so it was on this occasion. The Book of the Prophet Isaiah was put into His hands by the Chazzan, and He turned to the sixty-first chapter, and read out the first two verses, as they are

divided in our version. He then sat down to teach, as was the custom of Rabbis among the Jews; and St. Luke indicates the hushed expectation of the congregation by the striking expression, "and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him." He began His discourse by telling them that the prophecy He had just read was being at that very moment fulfilled. The rest of the discourse is not given; but we may infer that He showed them how He Himself was the person there referred to; that the Spirit of God had visibly come upon Him at His baptism, as John had testified; that He had been anointed to preach the good tidings; that the kingdom of God was at hand; and that He had been sent as the Messiah, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to those bound by Satan, and recovering of sight to those whose minds were in darkness, and to announce this as a time of salvation to all who would accept His mission. The effect of His teaching upon the congregation, composed in the main of His townsmen, who had known Him from His infancy, was wonder at the impressive earnestness of His manner and the touching power of His appeal to them, combined

with the counteracting influence of their persuasion that He was only the son of Joseph the carpenter, whom all had known.

Jesus read their thoughts, and thus interpreted them: "Ye will surely say unto Me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Thy country." The meaning may be thus explained: "If you think Me a mere man, and the son of Joseph, then I must be one to whom the Messiah is to come, if He comes now, and cannot be the Messiah Himself. As what I did at Capernaum was to heal the nobleman's son of his fever by the mere power of My will; you would say to Me, Do you now, if you have that power, heal yourself of this feverish fancy that you are the Messiah." So we may understand their expressions as indicating their determined refusal to accept Him, and to oppose a blind resistance to the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. Jesus answered their thoughts by another proverb, that "No prophet is accepted in his own country," and therefore He could not expect to be accepted by them, but that the effect of His rejection by the Jews would be that the good tidings they refused to hear would be preached to the Gentiles, and this He

illustrated by referring them to the story of Elijah relieving the widow of Zarepta, which you will find in the First Book of Kings, the seventeenth chapter and ninth verse ; and to the healing of Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy by Elisha the prophet, as recorded in the Second Book of Kings, the fifth chapter and sixteenth verse. The inference He intended them to draw was that it might be with them as it was with the Israelites on these occasions. They were not relieved while these two prophets exercised their power in favour of persons who were Gentiles. The bare idea that His own townfolk, who were Jews, might be rejected, and Gentiles admitted to the privileges of the Messiah's kingdom, infuriated them, so that they thrust Him out of their city, and endeavoured to lead Him to the brow of the hill, and to cast Him down headlong ; but on this, as on other occasions Jesus showed that He was protected by a hidden power which they could not resist when any attempt was made to destroy Him before He had fulfilled His mission, "and, passing through the midst of them, He went His way." When Jesus thus left Nazareth He came, St. Matthew tells us, and dwelt in Capernaum. Nazareth could no longer be a

home to Him, even if it had suited the high purposes of His mission that He should return to the family dwelling; and Capernaum now became His permanent abode till He ceased to have a resting-place anywhere. In adopting Capernaum as His home, St. Matthew says, He fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah, which you will find in the ninth chapter of that book. The names there given are those of the tribes of the Israelites among whom the land was apportioned. The southern part of Lower Galilee, consisting principally of the great plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon, was the portion of Issachar. North of that was the portion of Zebulun, and beyond it that of Naphtali. The expression "beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles," refers to separate parts of the country, the one to Peræa, which was part of the tetrarchy of Galilee, and lay beyond Jordan, the other to Upper Galilee, which was called Galilee of the Gentiles; and St. Matthew explains that Capernaum was on the sea-coast of the Sea of Galilee, and therefore by the way of the sea, and was on the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali. When Jesus first entered Galilee, after returning from the Passover, and went to Cana, it is probable that those who had joined Him as disciples returned to their ordinary

occupations, for we find no mention of their being with Jesus while He taught in the synagogues of Galilee, and their presence with Him was not then necessary. This is no doubt the reason that no particulars of His teaching in the synagogues are given, except the general statement that He preached the Gospel of the kingdom, and the scene which took place in the synagogue at Nazareth. As St. Luke alone records this scene, it is probable that he received his information from Mary herself, who was no doubt present, and upon whom it must have made a deep impression. When Jesus established His settled home in Capernaum it appears to have become desirable that His disciples should be permanently with Him, in order that, by witnessing all He said and did, they might be trained for the higher mission He was ere long to confer upon them. St. Matthew gives us a short account of how He called Peter and Andrew, James and John, to leave their occupations and follow Him, but St. Luke gives us the call of these disciples more in detail in his fifth chapter. He tells us that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God, He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, which was another name for the Sea of Galilee, and saw fishing-vessels drawn up

at the shore, and the fishermen on shore washing their nets. One of these vessels belonged to Simon Peter, and Jesus entered it, and begged him to thrust out from the land, while He sat down and taught the people from it. He then directed Simon to launch out into the deep, and let down his nets for a draught. Simon told Him that he had been fishing all night, but had caught no fish; nevertheless, at His word, he would let down the net. The result was that the take of fish was so enormous that the net broke with the weight, and after he had summoned James and John, who were his partners, and who were in the other fishing-vessel, they filled both vessels, so that with the weight of the fish they began to sink. The fishermen were filled with astonishment, and the impulsive mind of Peter was so overwhelmed with the conviction that he was in the presence of a Divine Person, that he exclaimed, "Depart from me, O Lord; for I am a sinful man." But Jesus answered, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." So when they had brought their fishing-vessels to land, they forsook all, and followed Him. The miraculous draught of fishes was no doubt symbolical of the numbers who, under their preaching as fishers of men, would

eventually join the Church of Christ. The shorter narratives of St. Matthew and St. Mark merely give the latter part of this narrative, but do not mention the circumstances which preceded the command Jesus gave them to follow Him, or the effect of the miracle which led them at once to abandon their occupations and obey the call. It is as well that I should explain one circumstance connected with it to you. Many persons think that there is here a great difference between the first three Gospels and the Gospel of St. John. They say that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, appear here as fishermen of Galilee, and as occupying the same rank of life as Simon and Andrew. But in the Gospel attributed to St. John himself he appears as a person of greater cultivation, and as having his home in Jerusalem, while he narrates mainly those features of the mission of Jesus which took place in Judea and at Jerusalem, and says comparatively little about His work in Galilee. Now the brothers Simon and Andrew were undoubtedly merely operative fishermen of Galilee, but St. Mark indicates that James and John were in a better position, for he says that they were in the ship with their father Zebedee and his hired servants. Zebedee, therefore, was one who

employed others to fish for him—Simon and Andrew as partners, with a fishing-vessel of their own, who shared in the produce,—and hired fishermen in his own vessel. The explanation is that every householder in Jerusalem had a right of fishing at certain seasons in the Sea of Galilee, and his being found fishing there with his sons was no way incompatible with his being a householder of Jerusalem. St. Mark tells us that they went after Jesus, and went into Capernaum, and no doubt Simon and Andrew, who had hitherto dwelt in Bethsaida at the north end of the lake, now took up their abode in Capernaum.

Lesson XX.

JESUS CASTS OUT DEVILS.

Read

ST. MARK i. 21—45 ; ii. 1—13 ; ST. MATTHEW ix. 9—17.

JESUS was now to manifest a still higher power than any He had as yet shown in His miracles, and that a power which could only be exercised by One possessing the essential attributes of God. He was to show that His power was greater than that possessed by the evil spirits, and that He could exercise authority over them. When He returned to Capernaum, with the four disciples He had called, He went on the first Sabbath into the synagogue, and taught as usual. St. Mark says "they were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes." The expression used by St. Luke is "that His word was with power." These scribes were learned men, who explained the glosses put

upon the law by the traditions of the Pharisees, but there were different schools among them, which had different interpretations. The leading schools of interpretation in the time of our Saviour were those of Hillel and Shammai, two learned Rabbis, and the teaching of the scribes usually consisted in merely repeating the various opinions of the Rabbis who differed among themselves; but Jesus taught with all the authority of one who could assert the true interpretation of the law or the prophets from His own superior knowledge. It is probable that on this occasion He had been commenting upon the sixteenth Psalm, which is prophetic of the Messiah, and had come to that verse where it is said, "My flesh also shall rest in hope, for Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." This application of these words to the Messiah, and to Himself as possessing that character, might well fill those who heard Him with astonishment, but it drew forth an unexpected recognition of its truth, for there was in the synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, who cried out, "Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us?" that is, the power of

hell and of corruption; "I know Thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." St. Luke calls the demoniac a man "which had the spirit of an unclean devil," or rather demon, for the word which in our Authorised Version is translated "devil," in connection with these cases of possession, is in the original invariably "demon," as you will see on the margin of the Revised Version. In this incident we come for the first time in contact with those remarkable manifestations of demoniac possession, which occur so frequently in the Gospel history, and I shall have an opportunity of telling you something more about them when we come to talk of some of the other cases, although this first appearance of it does throw some light upon the subject. The word *demon* is a Greek word, and was a perfectly well-known term in the Greek mythology. It was applied to an inferior class of their gods. Now the Greeks believed that men might be influenced by their gods, and even actually possessed by them, so as to become what they called oracles, such as the Pythia at Delphi, who was inspired by the god Apollo, but they had no idea of applying to these spiritual beings any distinction between good and evil; to them their gods were simply powerful beings who

might work good or evil to men according to their pleasure. The Jews considered that there were three kinds of spirits in the spiritual world. These were spirits, devils, and ministering angels. By ministering angels they of course meant the angels of God, but they applied the other two names to spirits of evil, and they considered that they affected men in two different ways, that is, both in the body and in the mind. They believed that certain diseases and plagues might be inflicted by the devils as the direct ministers of Satan, and that when the mind was given over to evil it became in time possessed by them. In connection with the Jewish turn of mind there always underlay in their ideas the distinction between clean and unclean, and they distinguished between evil spirits and unclean spirits. The former simply worked evil either to mind or body, but the unclean spirit was one that haunted places of burial, and such places as were accounted unclean, and those who were subjected to them were such as voluntarily sought to be inspired by them, with the view of acquiring a similar power of working evil, such as the witches in the middle ages were supposed to do, and those who, being involuntarily possessed

by such spirits, betook themselves to the tombs and similar places of uncleanness. How far there was truth in all of those opinions it is difficult to say, but it is evident enough from the Gospel history that there was reality in men being possessed by such spirits, both mentally and also through certain diseases being attributed to their influence. If, however, you attend to all the cases of demoniac possession recorded in the Gospel history, you will see that none of them were found in Judea, or among the Jews proper, but were mainly in Samaria and Galilee, where the population was of mixed descent, and even to a great extent originally heathen; and this again connects it with the heathen mythology, for the Jews did not regard the heathen deities as mythic beings, but as demons. They held that no true worshipper of God, who adhered to the law of God, could be subjected to them, but only those who either sold themselves to work evil or tampered with heathen customs. Thus when Judas Iscariot had resolved to betray our Saviour, and actually consented to do so, St. Luke used the expression, "Then entered Satan into Judas" (xxii. 3), and it was with this feeling that, on one occasion, when the Pharisees accused Jesus of having

a demon, they said, as you will see if you turn to the eighth chapter of St. John and the forty-eighth verse, "Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?" or rather a demon.

I have thought it as well to give you this full explanation now, as these opinions of the Jews do undoubtedly throw light upon the language used in the Gospels with regard to demoniac possession; and possibly such cases may have been very much more frequent at this time; it would almost appear as if the power of evil had become more demonstrative, and assailed the people of that country more directly and personally just as the Redeemer was about to appear among them to destroy the works of the devil,—as if it formed part of that great contest between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, which began in the wilderness of Judea and terminated on the Cross. Such direct possession of the human mind and body thus occurred in the same generation to which the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit of God belonged, and the two were in direct contrast; but there was one great difference in the mode in which both operated. The action of the Holy Spirit does not supersede the varieties of

human character, but elevates and sanctifies them ; while the demoniac possession appears to have destroyed for the time the sense of personality, and the unfortunate being subjected to it became as it were identified with the evil spirit which possessed it, as if their whole being were enslaved by him.

It is thus that the unclean spirit which possessed this man addresses Jesus through him, and when Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Hold thy peace, and come out of him ;" and the unclean spirit threw him into a convulsion, and came out of him with a loud cry, leaving the man quiet and evidently in his sane mind, it is no wonder that they were all amazed, and questioned among themselves what this could mean, for it was a new doctrine that One was there who with authority commanded the unclean spirits, and they obeyed Him.

It will no doubt occur to you that, with this view of what demoniac possession is, a Jewish synagogue, where the people were assembled to worship God, was surely a strange place in which to find a man with the spirit of an unclean demon. It may have been that he was brought there by the rumours that were afloat about Jesus, to see Him, but I am inclined to assign another reason. On the .

Sabbath there was an addition made to the fourth prayer in the *Schemon Esre*. It was this: "Thou hast freely bestowed upon man knowledge, and teachest him prudence. Thou hast divided between the holy and profane; between light and darkness; between the Israelites and the Gentiles; between the seventh day and the six working days of the week. As Thou hast made a distinction between the sacred and profane, so deliver and free us from every kind of crime, and from all evils of every kind with which men are afflicted: from all these preserve us, and grant us Thy grace." His friends, then, may have brought him to the synagogue on the Sabbath in the hope that he might be benefited by these prayers, and their zeal was rewarded by his unexpected deliverance through the power of Jesus.

St. Mark and St. Luke both add that the fame of this miraculous intervention on His part spread throughout all the region round about Galilee.

St. Mark tells us that, immediately after leaving the synagogue, Jesus entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, which was now in Capernaum, along with James and John, and He was told that Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, but as soon as He

took her by the hand the fever left her, and she was able to serve them. This took place in a private house, where there was no one to accuse Jesus of healing on the Sabbath ; but it was not till even, when the sun did set, that the people of Capernaum came to Him—all that were diseased in the town, and those that were possessed with demons, attracted by the cure He had worked in the synagogue,—and all the city was gathered together at the door of Simon's house. The reason they waited till then was that by the oral glosses put by the Pharisees on the law, as I shall show you in our next lesson, it was, generally speaking, held to be a breach of the sanctity of the Sabbath to heal the sick on that day, but, as the Jewish Sabbath terminated at sunset, which was usually held to be at six o'clock in the afternoon, the hours after that belonged to the following day. Then we are told that Jesus healed numbers that were sick of different diseases, and cast out many demons, who seem to have made the same recognition of His Divine character which the spirit of the unclean demon did in the synagogue. St. Luke tells us that what these demons cried out was, "Thou art the Christ," that is, the Messiah, "the Son of God."

In the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. He probably went to the low range of hills which bounds the plain of Gennesareth and approaches the shore at Capernaum. This is the first intimation we have recorded in the Gospels of Jesus holding communion with His Divine Father in prayer; and the morning of the next day was the morning of the first day of the week. It was therefore our Sunday morning that He spent in prayer, and He may have thus foreshadowed the change by which it was to become the holy Sabbath of the Christian Church.

When He was missed, and did not return, Simon and a number of people with him sought Him, and when they had found Him exclaimed, "All men seek Thee," and prayed Him that He should not leave them; but Jesus answered that He must go into the next towns and preach there also, as He came forth for that purpose, or, as St. Luke states it, that He must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore was He sent; and so He preached in the synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out demons.

St. Mark's narrative now brings us to one of the most interesting incidents in the Gospel history, that of Jesus for the first time healing a leper of his disease, which is recorded by all the first three Evangelists. This took place, according to St. Luke, "when He was in a certain city." The disease of leprosy was a disease of the skin, which gradually spread till the sufferer became a loathsome object, and it was highly infectious. It usually began with a small spot, which turned the skin and hair white, and the person was then bound to show himself to the priest, who, if he considered it to be leprosy, pronounced him unclean. He then had to fly from all association with his fellow-men, and live alone in places set apart for lepers, and was also bound, if any man approached him, to call out "Unclean, unclean." This leper, however, came to Jesus in the midst of the city, and the reason he was free to do so was this: If you refer to the thirteenth chapter of Leviticus you will find the laws that affected the lepers, and you will see in verses twelve and thirteen that if the leprosy had spread so as to have covered his whole person, the priest might pronounce him clean. The disease was then held

to have exhausted itself, and to be no longer infectious. Now St. Luke says of this man that he was "full of leprosy," that is, that he belonged to this class who were no longer debarred from intercourse with their fellow-men. The impression which the narrative gives is that he had come from a distance, believing Jesus to be the Messiah and the Son of God, and in full faith in His ability to free him from his disease, for St. Mark says he knelt down to Him, St. Luke that he fell on his face and besought Him, and St. Matthew that he worshipped Him; and nothing can be more impressive or instructive than the short dialogue that followed, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." "I will; be thou clean." The prayer of faith was at once answered, and as soon as He had spoken the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. You know that leprosy is in the Bible often used as a type of sin, and this may hold out an assurance to you, and me also, that, if we feel the burden and pollution of sin, and come to Jesus in faith that His blood cleanseth us from all sin, we too shall assuredly receive the same answer, "I will; be thou clean."

Jesus then tells the leper to say nothing to any

man, but to go his way, show himself to the priest, "and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded for a testimony unto them." These you will find from the fourteenth chapter of Leviticus were, that he was to go through certain ceremonies for seven days, and on the eighth he was to take two he-lambs and one ewe-lamb, and present himself with them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle, and there offer them as a trespass-offering and a burnt-offering. As the tabernacle was superseded by the temple, he had to go to Jerusalem for the purpose, which leads to the indication that he was probably a Jew from Jerusalem, and that the city may have been Scythopolis, the most southern city in Galilee.

Now, from this time forth, whenever Jesus went to Jerusalem, he lodged at Bethany, at a house sometimes called the house of Simon the leper, and sometimes the house of Martha, where dwelt also her sister Mary and Lazarus. The origin of the peculiar devotion of this family to Jesus is nowhere told us. It is not likely that Simon, though called a leper, was still afflicted with this disease, and if he was the leper who was cured on this occasion, we probably have in this incident

the origin of the friendship of Jesus for that family, and the reason why the Evangelists continued to call Simon "the leper."

St. Luke tells us that this increased the fame of Jesus, and that great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by Him; and He withdrew Himself into the wilderness and prayed. As Jesus went to teach in the synagogues in the cities, the probability is that this was the Sabbath; and the remarkable similarity between the multitudes coming to be healed after these events and His withdrawing Himself to hold communion with God in prayer, with the same incidents which took place after the curing the man possessed with a demon in the synagogue at Capernaum, leads again to the inference that this communion with God in prayer took place on the day after the Sabbath, that is, on our Sunday.

Jesus some days after returned to Capernaum, and as soon as it became generally known that He was at home, St. Mark tells us that a large number of persons gathered together to hear Him, so that the house was filled, and they crowded about the door, and He preached the Word unto them. St. Luke, however, makes the very important statement that "there were Pharisees and doctors of

the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem" (v. 17). Hitherto, except in the case of Nazareth, Jesus had met with no opposition in His mission; but the power and character of His teaching, and the unquestionable miracles He wrought, had made so deep an impression upon those in whose presence they took place, that His fame had now spread over the whole country, and the Pharisees seem at last to have resolved to watch His proceedings very closely, as we may infer from some of them having come from Judea and Jerusalem. St. Luke adds, "And the power of the Lord was present to heal them," but this is a mistranslation in our Authorised Version. It is correctly rendered in the Revised Version: "And the power of the Lord was with Him to heal." They were not long left without witnessing an exercise of this power, calculated to rouse their feeling against Him. A man who was sick of the palsy, or, as St. Luke says, "who was taken with a palsy," was brought on a bed on mattress borne by four men, and as they could not get near Him because of the crowd, they went up on the flat roof of the house by the outside stair which usually afforded access to it. There was on such

roofs commonly a grating to admit light and air when they pleased, but which was covered when the weather was cold or wet. This they uncovered, broke through the grating, and let him down through the roof with the bed on which he lay. Jesus, being aware that they did so in obvious faith in His power to heal him, made this remarkable utterance, "Son," or, as St. Luke says, "Man, thy sins be forgiven thee." Now I must explain to you that the Jews believed that certain diseases were brought upon them by their previous sinful life, and as a punishment for their sins. They founded this opinion upon the twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, where, if you refer to it, you will find that certain blessings are promised to those "who hearken diligently to the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do His commandments," and certain curses are threatened upon those "who will not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes, which I command thee this day," and "all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee." Now you will see that the twenty-second and following verses contain a whole list of diseases and physical evils which are

included in these curses. It is probable, from St Luke's expression, "being taken with a palsy," that the paralytic stroke had occurred not long before, and that it was the natural outcome of a sinful life in violation of the commandments of God. It had now brought him in penitence and faith to Jesus, who, seeing the Pharisees watching Him, may have thought that to remove the just punishment of his sins without indicating that they were forgiven through his penitence and faith might be open to question. For the Pharisees did not believe in the forgiveness of sins. It had no place in their ritual, and they held that sin must be expiated; but Jesus at once assured him of that forgiveness. The scribes and Pharisees, though still undecided whether Jesus were the Messiah or not, believed Him to be a mere man, and caught at once at the saying which in that view appeared to them blasphemy, saying, rightly enough, "Who can forgive sins but God only?" But Jesus answered, If I have power to remove from this man the punishment of his sins, must I not have power to forgive the sins which caused it? That power I have as the Son of Man, or the Messiah, of whom Daniel prophesied that He would make an end of sins; and I say unto this man, "Arise,

take up thy bed, and go thy way unto thine house." And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth. This silenced the objectors, while all the rest were amazed, and glorified God, saying, "We never saw it on this fashion;" or, as St. Luke puts it more graphically, "We have seen strange things to-day." It was a lesson to those who, like the scribes and Pharisees, thought there was no righteousness except in a rigid obedience to the law of God, and to that unwritten law which they had built upon it, and no prospect for those who broke the law but to lie under the curse of it, that, in the Messiah's kingdom, wherever there was penitence and faith, there would be forgiveness of sins; and this was a strange doctrine to them.

After this He went forth again to the side of the Sea of Galilee, and the people followed Him, and He taught them there, no doubt exposing the false teaching of the Pharisees, and there He saw a publican called Levi, the son of Alpheus, sitting at the receipt of custom, or as we would now say, at the custom-house. These publicans were, as you know, the collectors of the taxes and customs imposed upon the Jews by the Romans, and likewise by Herod, and were hated and despised by them in

consequence. This publican was probably one of those who came to John the Baptist, and, as his father was a householder in Capernaum, must have been well acquainted with all that Jesus said and did in Galilee. He was therefore well prepared to become a disciple, and when Jesus thought proper to call him with the simple words, "Follow Me," he embraced the call, not only with alacrity, but with joy, for St. Luke says, "And he left all, and rose up, and followed Him, and made Him a great feast in his own house." Now we learn from St. Matthew that this Levi was no other than St. Matthew himself, who seems to have taken that name after he became an apostle. It is characteristic of Jesus, who wished to break down the haughty exclusiveness and self-righteousness of the Pharisees, that He sat down at meat with an indiscriminate company of publicans and others, and when the scribes and Pharisees remonstrated with His disciples at what they considered a flagrant breach of propriety, Jesus answered that they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; and that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,—another feature of the Messiah's kingdom which must have been equally strange to

them and opposed to their prejudices as the former one. They then objected that His disciples acted differently from those of John the Baptist; for the latter fasted and prayed, as did the disciples of the Pharisees, but His disciples ate and drank. The Pharisees fasted twice a week, on the second and fifth days—that is, Monday and Thursday. These were the days when there was also service in the synagogue, and the disciples of John the Baptist merely held the usual synagogue fast; but there is no record of Jesus having entered a synagogue except upon the Sabbath; then, as the *Maphtir* who read from the prophecies, He was enabled to teach. His answer was to this effect: “Let them rejoice with Me while I am with them, and in their daily communion with Me as their Saviour and Redeemer; but the time is not far off when I shall be taken from them, and that is the time for sorrow.” His illustration is taken from the marriage-feasts, which lasted seven days, and when all rejoiced with the bridegroom, but which came to an end when he left them. The application of the parable which follows probably they did not understand. The meaning is, that John the Baptist and his disciples belonged to the old dispensation, and rightly fol-

lowed its customs while preaching that the kingdom of the Messiah was at hand; but Jesus came to establish that kingdom, and to inaugurate new rules and precepts which were to supersede the observances of their traditional law, that could have no place in it. The illustrations, though homely, were intelligible enough, and were well adapted to impress the people generally. This is the first appearance of that teaching by parables which afterwards became so frequent, and which was intended to convey instruction to the unlearned class among those who heard them.

Lesson XXX.

JESUS LORD OF THE SABBATH.

Read

ST. MATTHEW xii. 1—14 ; ST. JOHN v. 1—16.

THE portion of the Gospel history which you have just read has now brought us to a very important subject, and one that had a material influence on the result of our Saviour's mission. Hitherto the Pharisees had shown no unwillingness to hear Jesus, or to acknowledge Him as the Messiah, should He convince them of the truth of His mission. They were, as a body, regarding His proceedings with close attention, and were hesitating whether they were to accept Him or not, but now He ran counter to their keenest prejudices, which related to the sanctity of the Sabbath, and therefore the two incidents related to us by St. Matthew are also recorded by St. Mark (ii. 23) and St. Luke (vi. 1), while St. John adds a third in-

cident relating to the same subject, and which, we shall see, happened at the same time

St. Matthew begins the chapter, as you will perceive, thus: "At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn fields; and His disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat." St. Luke tells us that this took place on the second Sabbath after the first, or, more literally, on the second-first Sabbath. This expression is used by St. Luke alone, and occurs nowhere else. It has always presented a great difficulty to commentators from the earliest time, and there has been much difference of opinion as to its precise meaning; but I need not trouble you with these various explanations of it, but will give you my own idea. It is obvious that this incident must have taken place at the time of the harvest, when the grain was ripe, and before it was reaped. Now the Jewish harvest began at the time of the Passover, when, on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a sheaf of green barley—the grain earliest ripened—which was called the *Omer*, was waved before the Lord in the temple; and it ended at Pentecost, when two loaves made of the flour of wheat—the latest grain ripe—was brought into the temple. It must

therefore have been between the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost that the disciples plucked the ears, whether of barley or of wheat. Passover fell that year on the 29th of March, and Pentecost on the 19th of May. If you refer to the twenty-third chapter of the Book of Leviticus, and the fifteenth verse, you will see that in order to fix the time of Pentecost, "ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the Sabbath, from the day ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete. Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days." It was therefore one of these seven Sabbaths that St. Luke calls the "second-first Sabbath," and I think we can ascertain which it was. The feast of the Passover and the presenting the *Omer* on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were instituted, as you know, by the law as contained in the Pentateuch or Books of Moses, and were held on the 14th and 16th days of the first month of the sacred year, called *Nisan*, but the Pharisees, who added to it a traditional or unwritten law, introduced two minor feasts in connection with them. These were the Second Passover, held on the fifteenth day of the second month, called *Ijar*, and

“the thirty-third day after Omer,” held on the eighteenth day of the same month. The object they had in establishing this second Passover and celebration of the Omer at the interval of a month, was that those who had been prevented from taking part in the first Passover and waving of the *Omer*, from having been ceremonially unclean, or absent on a journey, might keep them at the second Passover. Now, the next Sabbath after Passover, that is, the first of the seven Sabbaths, was “the first Sabbath,” and the next Sabbath after the second Passover was “the second-first Sabbath,” and this would fall in that year on the 8th day of May. If this view is correct, it is a striking coincidence that the American traveller Robinson mentions, when passing through the south of Judea, that his Arab attendants, as they passed through the fields of wheat, were constantly plucking the ears of grain and eating, rubbing them with their hands, that this took place on the 9th and 10th of May, and that they declared it to be an old custom (ii. 192, 201).

Certain of the Pharisees observing this, said to Him, “Behold, Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day.” Now there

was nothing unlawful in their walking through the fields on the Sabbath, provided it was limited to what was called a Sabbath-day's journey; neither was there anything unlawful in itself in their plucking the ears of the corn and eating the grain. That was permitted by the law, as you will see by referring to the twenty-third chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy and the twenty-fifth verse, but what they found fault with was their doing so on the Sabbath. To the general commandment, "Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day," and the general prohibition, "in it thou shalt do no manner of work," we find in the law these special applications of them are added. First against travelling, as in Exodus: "Abide ye every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day" (xvi. 29); against lighting a fire: "Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day" (xxxv. 3); and against gathering wood, as in Numbers xv. 32-36, where a man was put to death for doing so on the Sabbath. But while the Pharisees modified these special prohibitions by permitting what was called a Sabbath-day's journey, that is, a distance of 2000 yards, they added no fewer than thirty-nine special prohibitions, which they called

primary, and as many more which they derived from them, and held to be included in these prohibitions, and they applied to the whole of them the law in Exodus, "Whosoever doeth work on the Sabbath shall be put to death" (xxxv. 2). Their rule was, "The works whereby a man is guilty of stoning and cutting off, if he do them presumptuously, but, if ignorantly, he is bound to bring a sacrifice for sin, are either primitive or derivative." Among the primitive works are, "To plough, to sow, to reap, to gather the sheaves, to thrash, to sift, to grind, to bake, to shear sheep, to dye wool," and many more. The derivative works are such as are of the same nature, as to dig is of the same kind with ploughing, chopping of herbs with grinding, so they held that "he that reaps on the Sabbath, though never so little, is guilty; and to pluck the ears of corn is a kind of reaping." This will give you an idea of how the Pharisees loaded the law of God with their minute regulations by the unwritten law, which rendered it a burden too great to be borne. The defence which Jesus made for His disciples was, in the first instance, that this was done out of necessity, hunger compelling them, not out of any contempt for the law. And to show them that necessity

would justify an infringement of such rules, He referred them to the case of David and those who were with him eating the shewbread, that is, the sacred loaves in the Holy Place of the temple, which it was not lawful for them to eat, but only for the priests, and yet they were given to them by Ahimelech the priest when they were similarly driven to it by hunger—you will find the account of this incident in the twenty-first chapter of the First Book of Samuel;—and again that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and yet are blameless. This was because the servile work done by the priests in the temple on the Sabbath were done in holy things, and required for the service of the temple, which led to a saying, “There is no sabbatism at all in the temple.” Jesus then takes higher ground than a mere justification from necessity. He says that there was One here greater than the temple, namely, the Lord of the temple, the Messiah, who came to inaugurate a more spiritual worship than the temple service, and that if they had understood what Hosea the prophet meant when he said, “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings” (vi. 6), they would not

have condemned those who were guiltless, and guiltless because they were the disciples of the Son of Man, that is, the Messiah, who is Lord even of the Sabbath. St. Mark says He is so because "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," that is, the Sabbath was given to man as a day of rest and a time of holy communion with God, but the Pharisees had made it, by their numerous minute regulations and prohibitions, an intolerable burden; and as the Messiah was to bring in a more spiritual service of God, so was He also to restore to the Sabbath its original character as a day of rest for man. This conversation would appear to have taken place in the synagog^{ue}, as in narrating the next incident St. Mark says, "And He entered again into the synagog^{ue}," and it was usually in the synagog^{ue} that these discussions between Jesus and the Pharisees took place; but St. Luke tells us that it was not on the same Sabbath, but on another, probably the next Sabbath, that He entered again the same synagog^{ue}, and there was there a man having his hand withered. It is probable that the Pharisees had brought him there in order to entrap Jesus, if they could, into another breach of the Sabbath, for they asked Him,

‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse Him,’ since they had surrounded this subject also with the same code of minute and trivial regulations and prohibitions. I may give you as illustrations of these—“Let not those that are in health use physic on the Sabbath day. Let not him who labours under a pain in his loins anoint the place affected with oil and vinegar, for that would require work, but with oil he may, for it can be done with less. He that hath an affection of the throat may swallow oil to relieve it, but may not gargle with it, as that would be work.” I need not quote more of these childish rules, by which they might well expect to entrap Jesus into some breach of their laws; but He again took higher ground, for He desired the man to stand forth, and said to them, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” and he refers to the case of a sheep falling into a pit on the Sabbath, when none of them would hesitate to lift it out. He then contrasts His own purpose to do good by healing the sick with their desire to entrap Him, so that they might accuse Him and put Him to death, which would be to desecrate the Sabbath by doing evil on that day. This seems to have silenced them,

for St. Mark says, "They held their peace," and he adds the touching remark, that Jesus "looked round about on them, for He grieved at the hardness of their hearts." He then told the man to stretch forth his hand, and it was restored like the other. St. Luke adds that the scribes and Pharisees were filled with madness, and communed with one another what they might do unto Jesus.

Three of the Evangelists tell us where these incidents took place, but it is not probable that the synagogue referred to was the one in Capernaum. As Jesus had His abode in Capernaum, He could hardly have been walking through the corn-fields with His disciples on the Sabbath day before the synagogue service, and they could scarcely have been in such a state of hunger so near home. The description is much more appropriate to an incident upon a journey. We do not find that in the synagogue in Galilee any opposition had hitherto been made to such works of mercy on the Sabbath, and it is more probable that He was on a journey through Judea, where He would encounter a far more bigoted spirit among the Jews of that country than among the mixed population of Galilee. That He did make a journey to Jerusalem about this time

and that it was connected with a similar accusation of a breach of the Sabbath, you will see from the fifth chapter of St. John, for he says, "After this," that is, after His first mission in Galilee, the particulars of which St. John does not give, as they were narrated by the other Evangelists, "there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." St. John does not name the feast, but as he connects with it Jesus going up to Jerusalem, it is reasonable to suppose that it was one of the three great festivals which required every male adult to go to Jerusalem; of these feasts St. John names two, viz. the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles (but he nowhere names the third, viz. Pentecost), the former three separate times. It is not likely, therefore, that the feast in question was the Passover, for otherwise he would have surely named it, and besides, if it had been the Passover, He would no doubt have found the court of the temple again occupied by the herds of sheep, and droves of cattle, and tables of the money-changers, as it was on the first and also on the last occasion when He attended that feast, but the feast of Pentecost had in reality no specific name, for it is called in the Books of the Law simply the Feast of Weeks, and it occurred not

many days after the two Sabbaths we have just been considering. Not only is the curing of the impotent man on the Sabbath obviously connected with the two preceding incidents, but if you compare what St. Matthew tells us after the latter, in verse 14, "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him," with what St. John says after the incident he narrates in the sixteenth verse, "and therefore did the Jews," by whom St. John always means the Pharisees, "persecute Jesus, and sought to slay Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day." These verses obviously refer to the same proceeding on the part of the Pharisees.

Jesus was then on His journey to Jerusalem when He passed through the corn-fields. He had probably gone by the same route which He took in coming to Galilee, that is, through Samaria, and the synagogue He entered would lie in that part of Judea north of Jerusalem where He had been baptizing nearly a year before, and would be well known to the Jews there.

That the feast in question was the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, is in accordance with a very early tradition in the Christian Church. It was insti-

tuted in connection with the harvest, when the first-fruits of the wheat harvest were presented in the temple, in the shape of two loaves made of wheat flour, and it also commemorated the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. You will find the obligation to keep this feast thus stated in the Book of Deuteronomy: "And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a free-will offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, in the place which the Lord thy God hath chosen to place His name there," that is, in Jerusalem (xvi. 10, 11). But while the two other great feasts—those of the Passover and of Tabernacles—lasted seven days, the Feast of Weeks was confined to one day. It fell that year upon a Wednesday, four days after the Sabbath when Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, and on the following Sabbath He went to a pool at Jerusalem, called in Hebrew Bethesda, that is, The house of

mercy, having five porches forming a sort of colonnade or cloister, and in it He saw lying there a number of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. Where this pool was exactly situated cannot now be determined. It is said to have been by the sheep-gate, but we do not now know which gate this was. It is mentioned in the Book of Nehemiah as having been built by Eliashib, the high priest, and when the walls of Jerusalem are described, it would rather appear to have been at the south-east corner of the city (iii. 1, 32), which would place the pool in the Vale of Jehoshaphat; but it cannot with certainty be identified with any of the existing pools there. The probability rather is, however, that it was the same pool that St. John elsewhere calls Siloam, for among those who lay at Bethesda were the blind, and when Jesus on another occasion restores his sight to a blind man He tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam (ix. 7), and at the pool now known as Siloam there are the remains of five porches. When you read the narrative which follows, you cannot fail to see that there are some strange features in it. These are contained in the fourth verse, "For an angel went down at a certain season

into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first, after the troubling of the water, stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had." The angel troubling the water, and the magical effect of it, resembles the superstition which attributes any unusual phenomenon of nature to spiritual agency, and is not at all in harmony with the usual character of the narratives in the Gospels. It undoubtedly, however, was not in the original text of the Bible. It appears to have been a legend added by some transcriber on the margin of his MS., and thus to have crept into the text, but the narrative, as it stood originally in the Bible, is thus given in the Revised Version: "In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered," or, literally, sinew-shrunk; "and a certain man was there which had been thirty-and-eight years in his infirmity. When Jesus saw him lying, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, He saith to him, Wouldest thou be made whole? The sick man answered Him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Arise, take up thy bed and walk. And straightway the man was made

whole, and took up his bed and walked." You will see that there is nothing in this narrative which implies any supernatural agency in the effect of the water. It was simply its natural effect, like that of many mineral springs in curing or alleviating disease. There are mineral springs in Europe which are held to have a special effect in relieving paralysis, while it is difficult to ascertain what the quality in the water is that possesses this virtue. So there must have been an analogous element in the water of this pool, which made its presence known by a disturbance of the surface of the water. At many of these watering-places, where there are public tanks of the healing water for poor people to bathe, you would even now see a very similar scene.

Jesus then heals this paralytic man exactly as He had healed the man taken with the palsy in Capernaum, by simply directing him to take up his bed and walk; but there is this distinction between the two cases, that, in the latter case, the man had evidently been just seized with paralysis, but in this case it was a disease of old standing, as St. John tells that the man had had it thirty-eight years. Another distinction was that, on this

occasion, the man was healed on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees do not appear to have seen the cure performed, but they met the man carrying his bed, and accused him at once of a breach of the law regarding the Sabbath. They knew nothing about his having been cured on the Sabbath, but they said to him, "It is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed." Now it was not unlawful to carry a burden in a private place, but it was against their law to do it in public on the Sabbath. If you will turn to the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, chapter seventeenth, verse twenty-first, you will find the law thus stated: "Thus saith the Lord, Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do ye any work; but hallow ye the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers;" but the Pharisees added to this rule the following gloss: "Whoever on the Sabbath carries out anything either from a private place to a public, or from a public place to a private, if he do this unadvisedly, he is bound to offer sacrifice for his sin; but if presumptuously, he is punished by cutting off and being stoned." He was probably

met by the Pharisees carrying his bed from the pool into Jerusalem by the sheep-gate, which was a direct breach of this law, and the Pharisees at once accused him of it. The man justified himself by saying, "A man healed me of my paralysis by the word of His mouth, and the same man told me to take up my bed and walk. If He had power to work so great a miracle, surely He had authority to authorise me to do what He commanded. How was I to withstand one who had healed me?" The Pharisees evidently did not know that it was Jesus who had healed him, and asked the man, not who it was who had healed him, but who it was that had desired him to carry a burden on the Sabbath day. They evidently wished to find Him, that He might be tried and condemned for it; but the man could not tell who it was, for he had probably never seen Jesus before, neither could he tell them where He was, for Jesus, in order to avoid the crowd, had taken Himself away. The man appears afterwards to have gone to the temple, probably for the purpose of offering sacrifice for his sin, as required by the unwritten law of the Pharisees when done unadvisedly, and there Jesus met him, and said to him, "Thou art made whole; sin no

more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." You will observe He does not say, as He often did, "Thy faith hath made thee whole," and it is plain that the man must have led a sinful life, which had brought this disease upon him. But Jesus probably healed him, hoping that his being relieved of this infliction might bring him to lead a better life. The man, in order to relieve himself of the fear that he might be accused and punished for a breach of the law, at once went to the Pharisees and denounced Jesus as the person who had healed him, and who, as he excused himself by saying, had told him to take up his bed and walk.

The Pharisees felt now that they had got hold of a tangible ground upon which they could accuse Jesus of a direct breach of the law, which inferred the penalty of death, and resolved to prosecute Him before their tribunal, and probably Jesus Himself felt that the time had come when He must bring the Pharisees either to fairly recognise Him as the Messiah, and to admit His power to alter and modify their unwritten law, or else to reject Him, after having a full statement of His claims to that character laid before them, and took this mode of bringing the matter to the point.

Throughout the whole of the Gospel history there is no incident which affords such a remarkable exhibition of human selfishness and human ingratitude as this incident of the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. He had lain there for many years, and no one was found charitable enough to help him down to the pool, and the return he made to Jesus for having relieved him of an infirmity which had afflicted him for thirty-eight years, was that he went immediately he recognised Him again, and denounced Him to the Pharisees, knowing well the fate that awaited Him at their hands.

Lesson VIII.

JESUS REJECTED BY THE PHARISEES.

Read

ST. JOHN v. 17—47.

WHEN Jesus met the impotent man whom He had healed, in the temple, the Sanhedrim, a great council of the Jews, appears to have been assembled there, and it was to this council that the man probably went when he informed them that Jesus was the person who had healed him and desired him to take up his bed and walk on the Sabbath day. When Jesus knew that he had done so, He appeared at once before the Sanhedrim, for there can be no doubt that it was to the great council of the Jews the discourse you have just read was addressed. If they expected that Jesus was to attempt to vindicate His disregard of their code of minute regulations regarding the proper observance of the Sabbath, and that they would find occasion to

destroy Him on that account, they were disappointed. Nor would they be less startled when what He addressed to them was a calm and dignified assertion of His essential divinity as the Son of God. The Pharisees admitted that the title "Son of God" could in a sense be applied to the Messiah, but considered that He was in Himself a mere man, and the usual title Jesus gave Himself as Messiah of "the Son of Man" was quite in accordance with their ideas; but the conception of the essential unity of God had obtained, since the Captivity, such a mastery of their minds, that they were jealous of any idea that seemed to conflict with it. Hence they every day repeated in the recital of their phylacteries, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord." And when Jesus showed them that the true Messiah would be in a genuine sense the Son of God, and that He was that Messiah, He assailed their bitterest prejudices. By taking this higher ground, the Sanhedrim found themselves obliged to exercise a different function from that of judicially condemning Him for a breach of the Sabbath, namely, the function of determining whether He was guilty of blasphemy.

As this discourse thus consists of a solemn

declaration of His true character, made to the great council of the Jewish nation, it is well that you should watch with close attention every utterance which fell from His lips. He opens His discourse with the words, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" that is, God rested on the seventh day, and blessed that day, and sanctified it; and yet by His providential actings and government of the world, continues to work even on the Sabbath; so I, as the Son of God, am Lord also of the Sabbath, and continue His providential work by doing good on the Sabbath and dispensing benefits to man. He thus draws a parallel between God's works of providence and His own works of mercy. He therefore not only asserted that God was His Father, but also that He had the same power with Him, that the same honour was due to Him, and that He had His functions in common with Him. The Jews, therefore, who heard Him, rightly judged that He made Himself equal with God.

Jesus then proceeds to demonstrate this truth more clearly, and addresses them very emphatically and solemnly by declaring that His work as the Son is not independent of that of the Father, but is essentially the same; that whatever things the Father doeth,

these the Son also doeth in like manner; that there is an eternal love and mutual intelligence between the Father and the Son, and that through that love yet greater works would be done than those of mere providence. These are, first, that as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth, or giveth life to them (an attribute which God announces in the Book of Deuteronomy as belonging to Him—"See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive" (xxxii. 39)—and a doctrine which the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection from the dead would admit, but not what follows), so in like manner the Son quickeneth or giveth life to whom He will; and, secondly, that the Father had committed the judgment of the world to the Son, so that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father; and that whoever honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which sent Him. He thus claims for the Son the same power and the same honour which the Father has, and so vindicates the relation of Father and Son in the Godhead as essentially real, and not merely official, and as involving absolute equality in their attributes, and by the expression "which sent Him," He identifies the latter with the Messiah.

He now applies this to Himself, and shows how He, Jesus, as the Son of God, in the first place, quickeneth or giveth life to whom He will. This is by faith in Him, that whosoever heareth His word, and believeth on Him, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but by the mere act of faith is passed from death unto life. And then He adds very solemnly, that the hour cometh, and is now actually, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear it will live; and this, too, was attributed to the Messiah by the prophet Isaiah when he says, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me; hear, and your soul shall live" (iv. 3). By the dead He here means those who are spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, dead in a slavish observance of the outward ordinances of the law, dead in spiritual pride and arrogance; and when He says that the hour now is, He means that the Son of God was then actually speaking to them, and if they would hear His voice, that is, believe on Him and accept Him, they too would not come into condemnation, but pass from spiritual death to spiritual life. For the life which is in the Father is in the Son likewise, and as the Father is self-existent, so has He given to the Son to be

also self-existent, and as possessing life in Himself, He can give of that life to others. Jesus then proceeds to declare how, in the second place, the Father has given the Son authority to execute judgment also, that is, as well as to give life, and that this judgment has been committed to Him because He is not only essentially the Son of God, but is also the Son of Man, and as such their Messiah. Here He obviously refers to the prophecy of Daniel: "I saw in the night-visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (vii. 13, 14). The Jews understood this of the Messiah, only they applied it to a temporal kingdom to be established by Him on earth; but that it refers to His coming to future judgment is plain from the declarations of our Saviour Himself, for He tells His disciples afterwards: "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father, with His angels; and then

He shall reward every man according to his works" (xvi. 27); and in the remarkable prophecy of the events that herald the end of the world, which St. Matthew records as having been uttered from the Mount of Olives in the week of His passion, He says, "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (xxiv. 30, 31). Again, when the high priest adjured Him by the living God to tell them whether He was the Christ, or the Messiah, the Son of God, He answered, "Thou hast said: nevertheless, I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (xxvi. 64). So also in the visions which St. John saw of the future in the isle of Patmos: he looked "and, behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a

loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap : for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle in the earth, and the earth was reaped " (Rev. xiv. 14-16). So Jesus tells those He is addressing not to marvel at the Son of Man having authority to execute judgment, and solemnly warns them that the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves, that is, the naturally dead in contrast to the spiritually dead, shall hear His voice and shall come forth—they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. He places before them good and evil—the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation,—and leaves them to judge in which class they, who were even now plotting to destroy Him for the good works He had done, would find themselves. When He says, " I can of Mine own self do nothing : as I hear, I judge," He is referring to the rules observed by the Sanhedrim, in judging that it must be according " as they hear and receive by tradition," that is, according to traditional precedents. He therefore tells them that He will not execute judgment arbitrarily, and of His own will, but will judge according to the eternal

law of God, and that His judgment will be just, because He will judge not according to His own will, but according to the will of the Father which hath sent Him; and the will of the Father is, that they should believe on the Son whom He hath sent. Again, another rule of the Sanhedrim was, that a man could not be a witness in his own cause, but must be judged by the witness of others; so He tells them if they suppose that He is bearing witness to Himself only, that is not true, for He can appeal to another witness to bear testimony to the truth of what He has said, and that witness is John the Baptist, whose testimony He knows to be true.

When many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John's baptism he said to them, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (St. Matt. iii. 11, 12),—thus bearing witness to the fact that the Messiah would execute judgment on the world; they that have done good being

represented by the wheat, and they that have done evil by the chaff. And when the Pharisees sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to John at Bethania beyond Jordan, to ask him, Who art thou? he answered them: "I baptize with water: but there standeth One among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose." And the next day, seeing Jesus coming to him, John told them, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a Man who is preferred before me. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (St. John i. 26, 27, 30, 32-34), thus bearing witness that Jesus was the Messiah who would execute judgment, and that He was the Son of God. Jesus reminds them, therefore, that they had themselves sent to John for His testimony, and though

He did not rest on the testimony of any man for His Divine character, yet He tells them this, since if they would still accept His testimony they would be saved; that John was a burning and a shining light, or rather, literally, "the lamp that burneth and shineth," and they were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. By the lamp that burneth and shineth Jesus refers to the spirit of prophecy. Thus St. Peter, in his Second Epistle, says, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place," literally, "a lamp shining in a dark place" (i. 19); and the Pharisees at first received John as a prophet, many of them, St. Matthew tells, being baptized of him, but others, as St. Luke tells us, rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized of him (vii. 30).

Jesus then tells them that He has greater witness than that of John. He has, in the first place, the works which the Father has given Him to do and to finish, and which bear witness that the Father had sent Him. He thus declares that the Father has given Him works to do, and that He has to finish these works. This is exactly what Isaiah prophesied

of the Messiah in his forty-second chapter: "Behold My servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth: I have put My Spirit upon Him;" "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth." "I the Lord have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house" (verses 1, 4, 6, 7). His work, then, was to fulfil the law by the holiness of His life, to preach the Gospel, and to work those miracles which it was prophesied that the Messiah would work. Those He undoubtedly did, but besides these miracles of healing, which bore witness to His being the Messiah, He had shown a power which no person but one who possessed the attributes of God could exhibit—a power of reaching the hearts of men, and of casting out demons from those possessed by them, and exercising authority over evil spirits. The Pharisees were so conscious that this latter power transcended what any mere man could possess, that they were driven on another occasion, recorded by St. Matthew, to declare that Jesus cast out

devils through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, but Jesus showed the absurdity of such a suggestion, and said, "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (xii. 28). Not only, however, do the works which His Father gave Him to finish bear witness that He is the Son of God, but the Father Himself has borne witness of Him, when the voice from heaven was heard at His baptism, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (St. Matt. iii. 17). It was as though He said, You Pharisees have never heard His voice, nor seen His shape, or rather, form. You have therefore no such witness for your own unwritten code. That voice was uttered to Moses on the mount, and to Elijah at Horeb, and it spake to Israel by the prophets, but since the Captivity it has never been heard, nor has any prophet appeared till the word of God came to John the Baptist, and he bare record to the Spirit of God descending upon Me in the form of a dove, and the voice being heard out of heaven; but you Pharisees have not God's word abiding in you, for whom the Father sent with such sanctions as these Him ye believe not. Then, in the next place, the Holy Scriptures bear witness of

Me. You believe that they are the Word of God, and you search them because you think that in them you have eternal life (for the scribes and Pharisees held that the mere study and knowledge of the things in the Scriptures was sufficient by the very work to give life, while they obscured their real meaning by their traditions), but you will not come to Me to learn their true meaning, and to receive that life which they reveal to be in Me. Then He adds : I am not come into the world, nor do these works, to receive honour from men, or that I might be glorified with any worldly glory, but the glory which is of God only ; for I know you, that with all your knowledge of the Scriptures, and all your profession of great righteousness, you have not the love of God in you, for were the love of God in you, you would receive Me, who come to you in My Father's name ; but while you reject Me the day will come when you will receive one who comes in his own name,—a prophecy which refers no doubt to the false Messiah, Barcochba, who appeared in the reign of Emperor Hadrian, and received the support of Rabbi Akibah, the head of the Sanhedrim, with the Pharisees generally, who accepted him as the true Messiah. He attempted to drive out

the Romans, and establish that temporal kingdom which they erroneously believed the Messiah would set up, but, after a war of three years and a half, he was defeated and slain, with a great slaughter of all his followers, and the Jews were then finally dispossessed of their land and dispersed over the world.

Not only, however, had the Pharisees not the love of God in them, and so would not receive Him, but they received honour one of another, and sought not the honour that comes from God only, or, as Jesus elsewhere says of them, "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi" (St. Matt. xxiii. 5-7); "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (St. John xii. 43). He had already told them that the Scriptures which they were so fond of studying testified of Him, if they would recall them aright; but as there were probably some among them who were Sadducees, and only accepted the Books of Moses, He tells them that

He need not accuse them to the Father for rejecting Him, for they have an accuser already in Moses, in whom they trust, or, as it is in the Revised Version, on whom they have set their hope; that is, their hope was based on a scrupulous observance of the works of the law, with all the minute and burdensome glosses they had put upon it; but if they believed Moses they would have believed Him, for he wrote of Him. Now, if you turn to the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and twentieth verse, you will find what Moses wrote of Him, for St. Peter there tells the Jews that "the Lord shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Deut. xviii. 15). The carnal mind of the Pharisees—though they were "the children of the prophets

and of the covenant which God made with their fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed,"—prevented their recognising the true meaning of this prophecy, and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, and so refused to hear Him.

I have thus endeavoured to give you a full explanation of this remarkable discourse, delivered under such striking circumstances, in which Jesus laid before the solemn assembly the grounds upon which He claimed, not only to be their Messiah, and as such having power to modify their laws, but also to be the Son of God, and possessing all the attributes of God; still they did not believe Him, and this will show you that there is no turn of mind that offers such resistance to the reception of the Gospel as a haughty self-righteousness. There is more hope for the sinful heart, or the darkened soul, than there is for the Pharisaical mind; and there can be no greater proof of this than their closing their minds and hearts against this earnest appeal to them by Jesus, and rejecting Him, notwithstanding the powerful arguments He addressed to them.

St. Matthew tells us, that "then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against Him how they

might destroy Him. But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew Himself from them" (xii. 14, 15); St. Mark gives it in more detail; he says, "And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him. But Jesus withdrew Himself with His disciples to the sea,"—that is, the Sea of Galilee (iii. 6, 7). When it is said that Jesus withdrew Himself, the expression is generally used with reference to Jerusalem, and it is obvious that on this occasion it would be quite inapplicable to Capernaum, which was on the Sea of Galilee. He appears to have gone at once into the desert, which extended from Jerusalem to the Jordan, crossed that river, and proceeded along its east bank to Galilee. The expression by St. Mark, that people from Judea and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea and from beyond Jordan, followed Him, indicates this as His route from Jerusalem (ver. 8). This council is therefore the same with that referred to by St. John, and as Jesus withdrew Himself when He knew of it, must have been held immediately after the discourse He addressed to the Pharisees. Jesus, however, being a native of Galilee, was under the jurisdiction of Herod, and therefore they joined the Herodians, or

those Jews who were in the service of Herod. They were probably Sadducees or Herodians. The Pharisees would not consider that the claim Jesus made to be their Messiah involved any crime, even if they did not accept it. That was a question with regard to which they would exercise the evidence on which it rested, and either confirm or deny His claim. Neither did His declaration that the judgment of the world had been committed to Him by God involve anything they could take hold of, for they believed in a future state, in which the good would be rewarded and the wicked punished, and admitted that the Messiah would execute that judgment ; but they could not forgive His open disregard of their laws requiring the keeping the Sabbath holy, and considered that this having been done presumptuously, subjected Him to the penalty of death by stoning. On the other hand, the Sadducees did not accept the unwritten law of the Pharisees, and disbelieved in a future state ; but both parties agreed in the opinion that the Messiah would be a mere man, and viewed with horror any opinion that appeared to conflict with the unity of God, and therefore the declaration by Jesus of His essential Divinity as the Son of God, appeared to them to involve the far

greater crime of blasphemy, and on this ground they resolved to effect His destruction. This is quite in accordance with what St. John says, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, not only because He had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (v. 18).

You will now see from the chapter we have gone over, that, in this opening period of our Lord's teaching, He mainly addressed Himself to the cultivated class among the Jews who frequented the synagogues, to the Pharisees, and scribes or doctors of the law, and that from His first appearance in the temple at the Passover to His second appearance there, thirteen months after, at Pentecost, He claimed to be not only their Messiah, but also to be the Son of God, with the same Divine essence, possessing the same attributes, and entitled to the same honour with the Father. During this period He taught in the synagogues, proving from the Books of the Prophets that He was the promised Messiah, and He preached the Gospel openly to the Pharisees as fully and freely as He did to Nicodemus in private. At first we are told that "many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles

which He did" (St. John ii. 23); and the Pharisees were not indisposed to recognise Him as the Messiah, but Jesus put no trust in them, for He knew their real nature too well; and when He at His second appearance in the temple so openly and forcibly declared Himself to them to be God as well as man, they finally rejected Him, because they would not believe that in that sense He was the Son of God. From that time henceforth their purpose was formed, if possible, to destroy Him.

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